LIL'
WONDERS
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LIL' WONDERS

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Mod Team

Head and Graphics Mod

Lav

te7o_lav
te7o_lav

Art Mod

Blu

Blu_koiii

Writing Mod

Trixie

trixstar
trixstarsss

Finance Mod

JJ

iloveatsuhina

Finance Intern

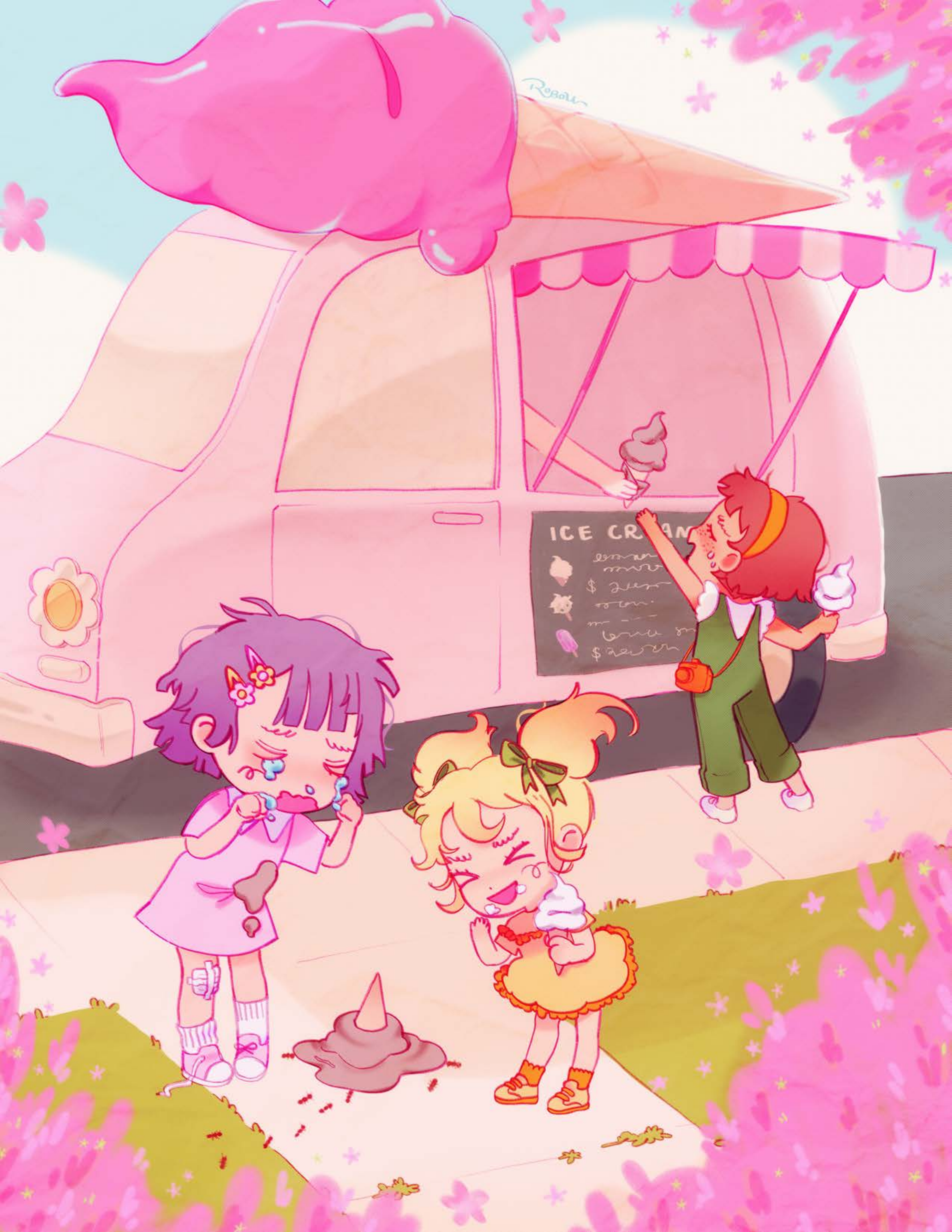
Milo

arasol
exisalPilot

Layout Mod

Floeer

floeer9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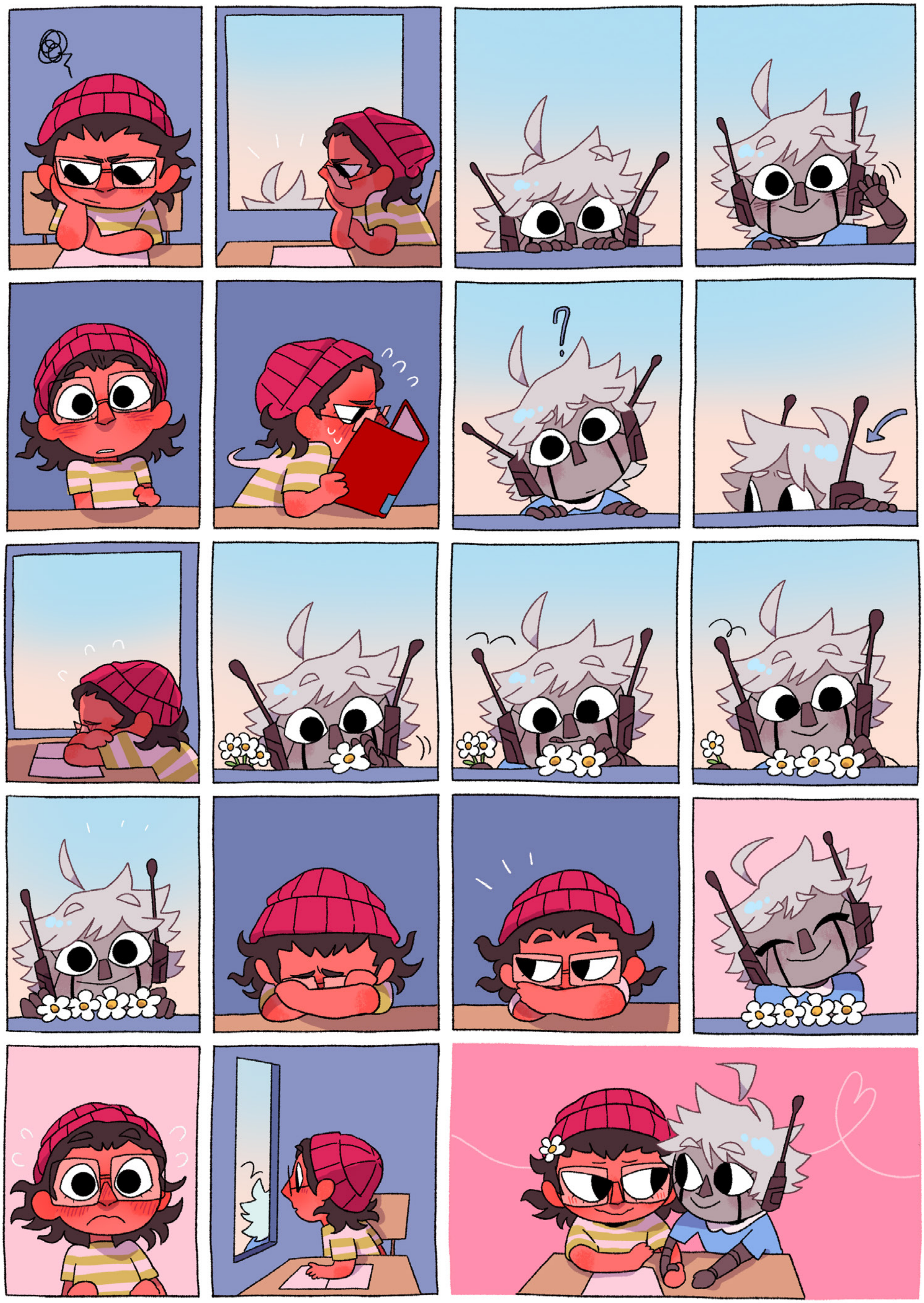


HOODIE2022

Little Miss Liar Pants

By Zee

herbleberble BurningFox6

Before there was Celestia Ludenberg, before the gambling, the twintails, the lies… there was Taeko Yasuhiro. A small, ordinary girl with big dreams of being a princess.

At playtime, anyway.

The instant recess began, all the kids scampered off to find something to do, their laughter and chatter filling the classroom. Friend found friend, assorted groups soon spreading out across the room.

Taeko stayed alone. Not that she didn't try to join in now and then, but she just… never stood out. If she got up and walked away, oftentimes nobody noticed. But that was fine with her. She'd gotten good at having fun by herself. Every time their preschool class had a break, her favorite thing to do was head to the big toy castle and act out scenes with all the dolls there. Her own royal court, where she was the center of attention, where her loyal subjects carried out her every whim… it never got old.

Today, though, others had gotten there first.

"You were right, Junko," Sonia said with a giggle. The real princess was playing a fake princess with a plastic tiara from the toy chest. "This does remind me of home!"

"Toldja so!" Across from her, the twins sat, with Junko sporting an even bigger crown and Mukuro sitting quietly by her side. "And since I'm the queen, that makes you my daughter! So you need to do what I say!"

Sonia clapped, blissfully unaware that it was never a good idea to let Junko hold the reins. "Okay!"

Taeko grit her teeth. Just her luck that people would impose on the one activity she claimed for herself. But beggars couldn't be choosers. She'd have to try and join if she didn't want to be bored all recess.

At least Taeko had always been good at putting on a pleasant face, whether she felt like it or not. Not showing even a trace of her annoyance, she approached the other kids. "Hello... is there room for me?"

Sonia looked her way, nodding eagerly. "Yes! Of cours-"

"Nononononononotyet." Junko shoved a hand over her mouth. While Sonia's muffled voice struggled to slip through her fingers, the queen turned to look Taeko up and down with an appraising eye. "Hmmmm... I don't think you're really a good fit for our castle."

Taeko gaped. "What's that supposed to mean?!"

"It meeeeeeans," Junko replied with a twirl of her finger, "you're just a... a pheasant! A commoner! Royalty only."

"But you're not royalty!" Taeko protested. The only person in class who was currently had Junko's hand over her mouth.

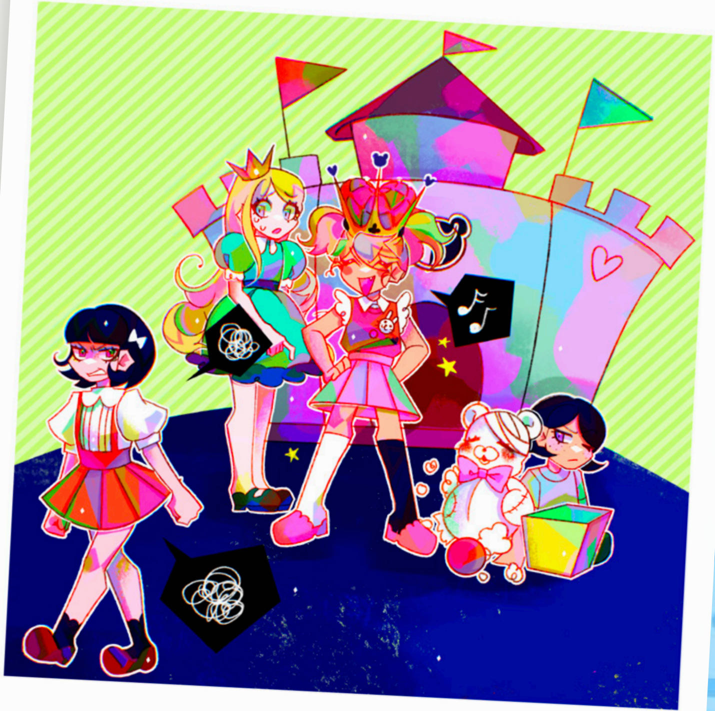
"Yes I am!" Junko patted the crown atop her head, grinning smugly. "I've got the crown, and that makes me a queen!"

Taeko couldn't believe this. "Then what about her?!" she snapped, pointing at Mukuro.

The other girl stayed quiet, looking to her sister. Junko answered for her with a shrug. "Every queen needs a jester."

Mukuro didn't seem all that amused with that explanation... not that she ever looked amused, period, but Taeko was even less pleased. Inside, she could feel a tantrum brewing. On the outside, she composed herself, turning her nose up with a small huff. "Fine. I'll go find something more interesting to do."

"Taaaa-taaaaaa," Junko sing-songed, waving farewell while Taeko marched off. She finally let Sonia go, the princess giving their departing classmate a sympathetic look.



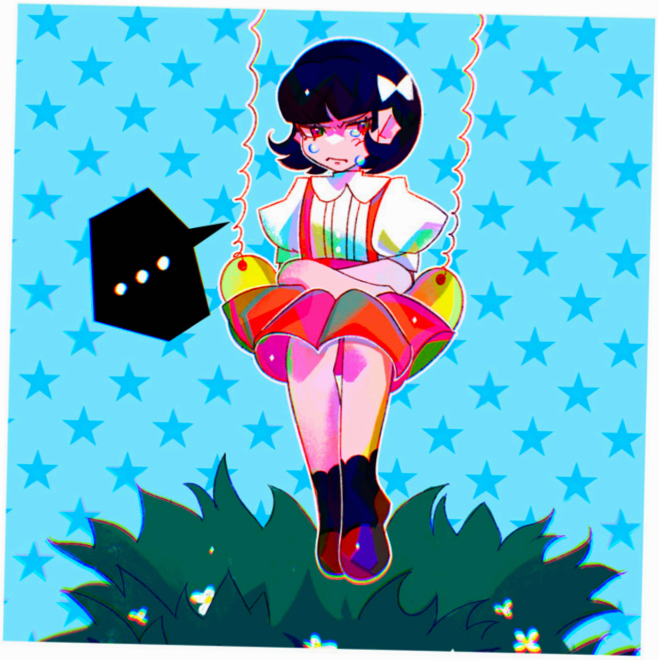
how DARE they....

"I don't understand..." she murmured. "We had room for more, yes?"

"Yes!" Junko agreed. "But not her. She's boring." Giggling, Junko grabbed the nearest doll and offered it up to her. "Forget her, let's play!"

They were at the castle the next day. And the next. They were still there when the weekend passed and they returned on Monday. And Junko always had an excuse to shoo Taeko away.

Outdoors, Taeko sat on the swings, alone. Some of the other kids squabbled across the yard, but she ignored them. She wanted to be alone with her thoughts.



what to do now?

It wasn't fair. She didn't ask for much, just to have her little fantasy at playtime. She'd long ago accepted she was too weak for the athletic kids, too average for the smart kids. Yet now she was being shoved out of her lone escape, too. And why?

Because she was mediocre. Commonplace. Boring.

A person no one would look at.

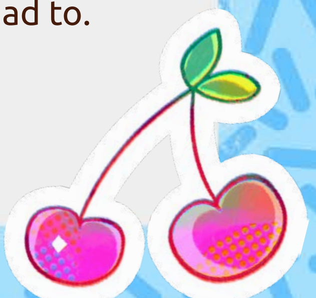
She sat in silence, staring down at her legs, her swing still. None of the nearby kids would notice her all alone and miserable. No one ever did.

And she was sick of it.

Getting kicked from her castle was the last straw. Something had to change. But what could she do about it? She'd get in trouble if she started a ruckus. No, she was cast out until those girls either got bored of it or she found a way to change Junko's mind.

But how? All she was really good at was fibbing. Hiding her feelings, her slip-ups. Spinning little white lies to get herself out of trouble when she had to.

...And maybe that was all she needed.



If they didn't want to play with plain old Taeko… maybe she could make herself into someone they *wanted* to hang with. No more plain old outfit, no more bland little haircut. A plan was already forming in her head.

She had a bunch of hair accessories for her dolls at home. If she clipped them to herself, she might just be able to fancy herself up a bit. She could also ask her mom if she could wear the dress they saved for special occasions. If her parents said no, Taeko could just say school was having a show-and-tell and she wanted to show everyone how pretty it was.

Of course, the class was doing no such thing. Yes… tell some small lies to prepare for her bigger ones. Why not? The smallest smile flitted over her face. She had a lot of tales to spin.

* * *

"…And so I decree," Junko crowed in her haughtiest voice possible, "Sir Stuffington is to be decaffinate… decapulated…" She pursed her lips. "His head cut off."

Sonia gasped. "No! He's innocent!"

"And the teacher will notice if you break a toy," Mukuro pointed out from the side.

Junko shot her a look. "Do you wanna be next?"

But before Mukuro could end up on death row, someone approached. Someone new.

At least, they didn't look like they usually did. Taeko had returned, barely recognizable. She'd traded in her tacky schoolgirl skirt for something stark, dark, reaching down to her ankles. Ringlets of curls tumbled from her hair, their clips jostling with each step.

It took a moment for the other kids to recognize her. "Ooo… I like your new look!" Sonia praised.

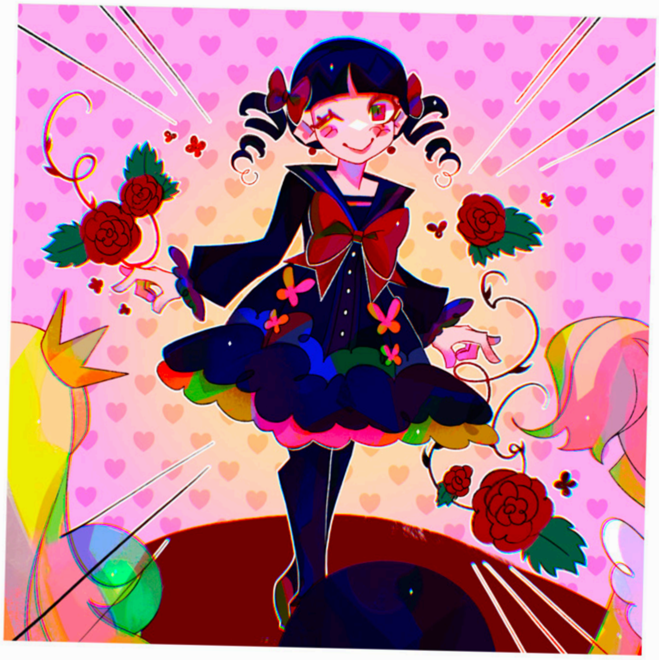
Yet Junko scoffed. "She needs to do more than just dress up to join us."

"Dress up?" Taeko chuckled. "I'm not dressing up… this is just what I wear now. Guess what? Something interesting happened yesterday…"

She leaned in, not a trace of dishonesty in her voice. She'd rehearsed her story too much for that. "My real family found me. It turns out my father is a French noble, and my mother, a famous German musician." She beamed, savoring the confusion in their eyes. "They told me everything... I'm not Taeko. I'm Celestia Ludenberg, daughter of a duke."

She curtsied, inwardly cackling at their flabbergasted faces. "So I guess I *am* royalty after all. Am I a good fit for the castle now?"

Truth be told, she mostly just wanted to rub her fabricated life in Junko's smug face... but she had to suppress her own surprise when the other girl simply smiled at her and took her crown off. "Totally! In fact, that makes you fit to be the queen today!"



A true Cinderella story!

Junko offered the hat to her. Celestia half-expected the girl to yank it away at the last second, but instead, she relinquished it willingly when Celestia plucked it from her fingers. She had to fight to stay calm, toning down the grin she craved into a humble smile. "Thank you. Now, what's Stuffington done?"

Celestia was finally back where she belonged, kneeling down to reclaim her castle. While Sonia filled her in, Mukuro leaned in to whisper in her sister's ear. "Do you really believe her?"

Junko sneered. "Nuh-uh. But I wanna see where this goes!"

As it turned out, it went pretty far. From that day on, Taeko refused to answer to her old name. She kept wearing her fanciest get-ups and telling bigger and bigger lies to make her life seem as grand as possible.

It didn't just get her her castle back... it drew others' eyes as well. Suddenly, people approached her, curious about her makeover, enraptured by her stories. She repeated them again and again, until they'd been engraved in her memory, until she barely recalled the girl she used to be.

Taeko was gone... and Celestia was here to stay.

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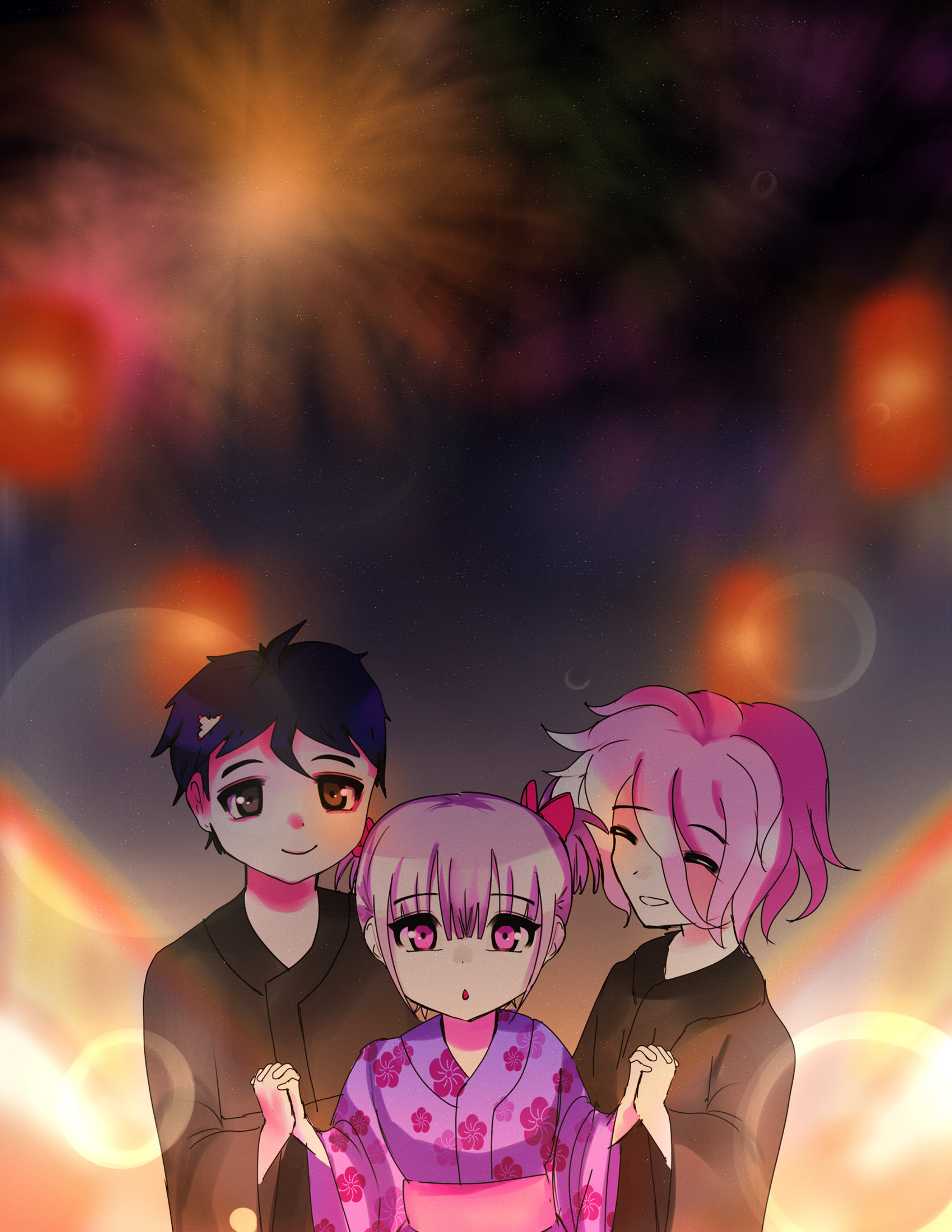
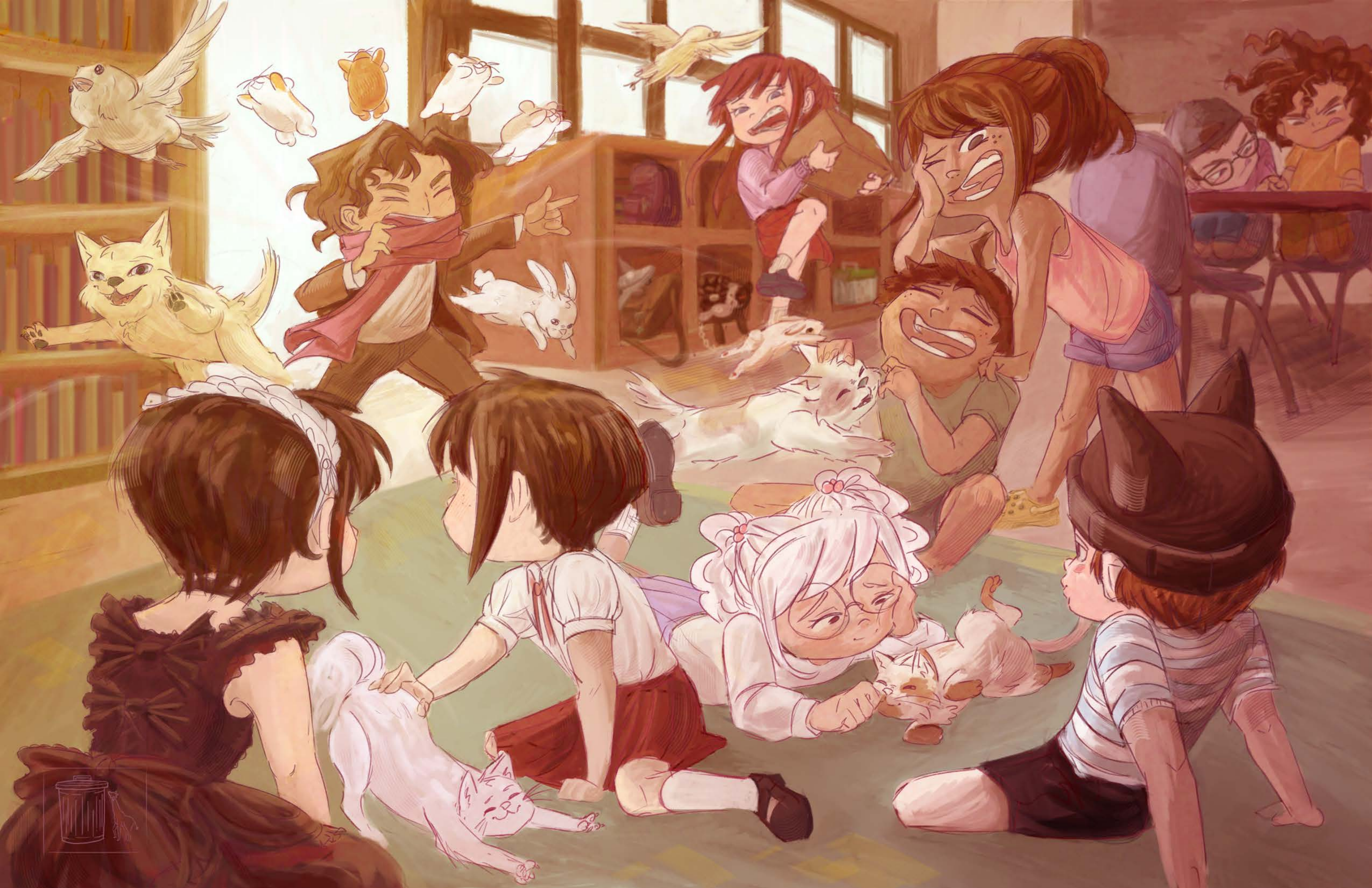




Lil' Ultimate Star and her Stubborn Judge

By Omori

After what felt like centuries to everyone, free time had finally begun. And once it had, everybody was off to do their own thing. Free time consisted of what most would assume: coloring, drawing, accidentally stepping on building blocks, and reading picture books. Junko didn't care much for any of that. Unlike most of the kids, Junko decided to partake in her favorite free time activity: dress-up!

Out of everyone in her classroom, she played it the most and had thus earned the title of: "Lil' Ultimate Star". She bragged about it like it was an entire gold star sticker sheet, and she pinky swore that she was going to continue living up to her title. It was a silly thing, but it meant the world to her. *This* game of dress-up was going to be a bit different though. Today, she was going to host her first ever fashion show! It wouldn't be anything like the ones she saw on TV, but she had to start somewhere. She had accessible dress-up clothes (that were regularly washed, sanitized, and somehow always looked brand new with every wash), so all she needed now were judges. Every fashion show had three judges, and she was confident she'd be able to recruit three of her own in a snap. After all, who could resist Junko's obvious glamor and suave?

Her sister was sitting at her desk reading a picture book in solitude, so she was out of the question. But as Junko started asking her classmates, she was only receiving the most unfavorable answer: no. That, or her classmates were "too busy". Sonia was more interested in learning about hamsters with Gundham; Makoto politely let her down; Sayaka wanted to try and do some songwriting instead; Celeste apparently had "better things to do" and didn't bother providing a further explanation. She went to all of her classmates, and in the end, came out empty-handed and annoyed. All she wanted were three judges, and she couldn't even get one! She wasn't about to give up, but she was going to blow a fuse if someone didn't say "yes" (and compliment her) soon.

That's when Junko noticed Hajime, an average brown-haired boy, sitting by his lonesome. He wasn't even doing anything in particular, other than rolling an orange crayon up and down his desk. With a burst of confidence, she skipped over to him and placed her hands on his desk.

"Hey, you! You look kinda bored. Do you wanna be my fashion show judge?" Junko asked, grinning.

"Your… what?" Hajime said, raising an eyebrow in confusion.

"My fashion show judge, dummy! I wear clothes and show off how pretty I am, you give me a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, it's super easy! You should be my judge."

"Why me? Have you asked any of your friends if they wanna be your judges?"

"I've asked, like, *everyone*, but they're either too busy or just don't wanna say I'm pretty. Everyone is being a meanie to me, and I don't know why!" Junko pouted, frowning and rubbing her eyes. "I just wanna have a fashion show, and I can't have a fashion show without a judge. So will you *plleeaassee* be my judge, Hajime?"

"But—"

"I'll give you my orange juice box if you say yes!"

Hajime looked down at his crayon, then back up at Junko. Crayon, Junko, crayon, Junko. His friends were busy too, and he couldn't think of anything else he wanted to do. He could use a change of pace, as well as another orange juice box for lunch. Standing up, he sighed: "Okay, fine. But I'm *only* doing this for the juice box."

"Aw, thank you bunches and bunches! Now come on, the show's gonna be right over here."

Junko grabbed Hajime's hand and dragged him over to where the "fashion show" would be: one of the four corners of the classroom. The box of dress-up clothes sat in said corner, but Junko needed to set something up for her new judge now. She grabbed a cushion for Hajime to use as a chair, and grabbed a random amount of books to pile up and be used as a table. She placed her hands on her hips and grinned.

“There you go! As a judge, you’ll sit there and tell me how good my clothes are,” Junko explained, gesturing to the last-minute set-up.

Hajime stood there, already second guessing if doing this was a mistake or not. He walked over and sat on the cushion, internally noting how uncomfortable it was. At least the pile of books was high enough for him to comfortably rest his hands. “What if I don’t think they look good? My mom and dad said I should *never* lie, so—”

“Your mommy and daddy need to be put in time-out and *stay* in time-out. I’m gonna look so pretty, you’ll want me to write my name on your silly face.” Junko playfully pinched Hajime’s cheek, earning a groan and resistance. “Now, here is how Junko’s Fashion Show will go. You’ll close your eyes while I put on dress-up clothes, and when I’m done, you’ll open your eyes and do judge stuff. We’re gonna do this three times ‘cause that’s what all of the fashion shows do. Are you ready for the best fashion show ever?”

“No. No, I’m not.”

“Good! Now close your eyes so that we can start.”

Hajime reluctantly closed his eyes, covering them with his hands for good measure. He could hear faint rustling in front of him. One of the best parts about dress-up was being able to just slap the clothes on; slip them over your current outfit and consider your game of dress-up a success! Out of pure habit and impatience, he began to fidget and shift around on the cushion. Deep down, he knew it would take less than a minute, but it felt like thirty minutes to him regardless.

Once he heard the words, “I’m done!”, he instantly uncovered and opened his eyes. For Junko’s first outfit, she chose to wear a clover green knee-length dress, a clover-themed purse, and a pair of green slip-ons. The black leggings she was already wearing before the fashion show popped out the most, but they didn’t make the outfit look bad. She struck a few dramatic poses, showing off the frills of the dress, and looked directly at Hajime, pride gleaming in her dark red eyes.

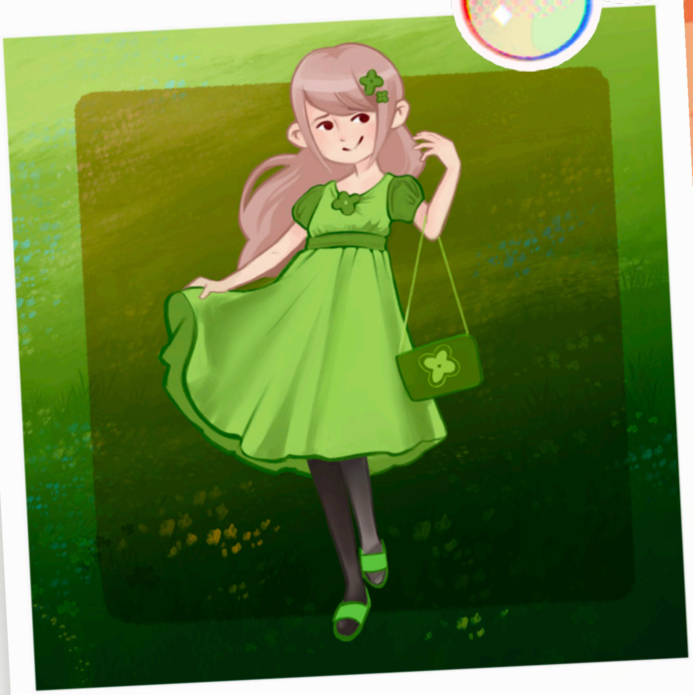
“So, what do you think? Green is a good color ‘cause it’s the color of money and clovers. I think I look prettier than one-hundred clovers!” Junko declared, striking one last pose.

“You look… you look…” Hajime tapped his fingers on his “table,” gazing away. “You look gross. You kinda look like a booger with arms and legs. I give that a zero. It kinda sucks.”

"Excuse me?! Why would you say I look like the thing you pick from your nose? Boogers aren't pretty and cute. You're, like, the biggest poopy head in this classroom! Are you trying to get fired and not be my judge anymore?"

"Do you want me to lie this time, or do I have to tell the truth?"

"You—!" Junko pinched Hajime's cheek again, only this time, it wasn't playful and she was pinching *way* harder. She stomped her foot and kept pinching without mercy, glaring daggers into Hajime. "You are going to be my judge, and you are going to like it! But if you don't stop being a poopy head, then you're not getting my orange juice box, and I think I'll even take yours and drink it! You won't have any orange juice then!"



0/10 - A walking booger

"You wouldn't!"

"I would. But I won't if you judge me and my clothes right. Be nicer, or else no orange juice! Let's pinky swear on it." Junko let go of Hajime's cheek and held out her pinky. "You better pinky swear right now or else I'll tell on you."

Hajime rubbed his cheek, hissing in pain and glaring at Junko. He wanted to say "no" so badly; more than what words could describe. But, putting his aggravation aside, he felt like that was a little too mean, and at the same time, he didn't want to say "no." There's a solid chance he'll never do this again, but it was certainly new. Besides, he was talking to someone other than Nagito and Chiaki, so he considered that as well. In the end, he figured it'd be better to rip the bandaid right off than to let it linger and eventually peel off. It was just a dumb game of dress-up, after all, so why was he making it a bigger deal than what it should be?

"Ugh… okay, fine, I'll be a nicer judge. I pinky swear." Hajime linked pinkies with the bossy girl. With his other free hand, he impulsively reached over and pinched Junko's cheek. It wasn't as rough as her pinching, but it wasn't completely gentle either. He faintly grinned. "I don't like waiting though, so can you go put on the next outfit now?"

“What’s the magic word?”

“... Please.”

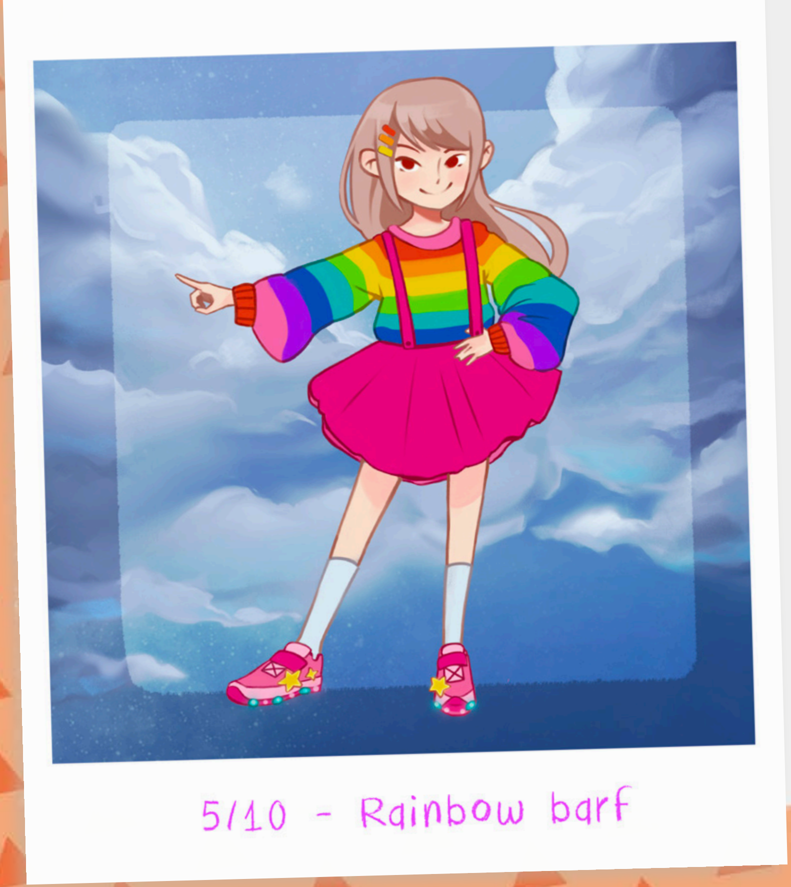
“Done and done, Ham-jam! That’s your new nickname, by the way. You’re pretty lucky to have a nickname, so remember that. Okay, okay, I’m done talking now. Close your eyes and get ready for another great outfit!”

This time, Hajime resisted the urge to sigh again as he closed his eyes. He could hear Junko giggle and mumble to herself as she changed into her next outfit. He still didn’t know how to feel about this ridiculous fashion show, but he was glad she was enjoying it at least. It makes this show *somewhat* worth it.

Only somewhat.

“Get ready for another cute outfit, Ham-jam! Open your eyes again.”

Hajime opened his eyes once again. For round two, the outfit she chose to wear was *way* more colorful compared to her first outfit. She was wearing a rainbow sweater that swallowed her small frame, a bright pink skirt with overall straps (Hajime didn’t even know such a thing did or could exist. He thought it looked really weird), and cheap-looking light-up sneakers. Her second outfit was the definition of “eye candy,” but it was also the definition of “overboard.”


5/10 - Rainbow barf

“If I had these clothes at home, then I would wear them as much as I could. That way, people can tell me how wonderful I look. Ham-jam, what do you think?” Junko asked, twirling around.

“Well… looking at you hurts my eyes. It’s too much. Too many colors,” Hajime admitted, not even flinching or feeling bad when Junko began to tense up. He simply gave her a sideways-thumb. “But I like it more than the first one. Nobody likes boogers, but a lot of people like rainbows and stuff. The light-up shoes are my favorite. I give this a five, which is way better than a zero."

"Yeah, I *know*. Oh well, sounds like my eyes work better than yours. Maybe you should get some silly glasses for your silly face. Glasses always look good on me, but I guess they would look okay on you."

"Um, thank you?"

"You're super welcome! All right, I know this last outfit will make you give me a ten. It'll be the most prettiest, most cutest, and most bestest one ever!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure! I'm suring my little head off. Now be quiet and—"

"Yeah, I know, close my eyes. I know."

For the third time, Hajime closed his eyes, his patience not as thin at this point. While he would never admit it out loud, he was secretly intrigued to see what Junko's final outfit would be. Her fashion sense was more extraordinary compared to his friends and their classmates, but it was also interesting to see what she would pair with what. Maybe boredom was starting to get to him, or maybe he was genuinely starting to enjoy this. He didn't really know, but what else was there to say? The show must go on.

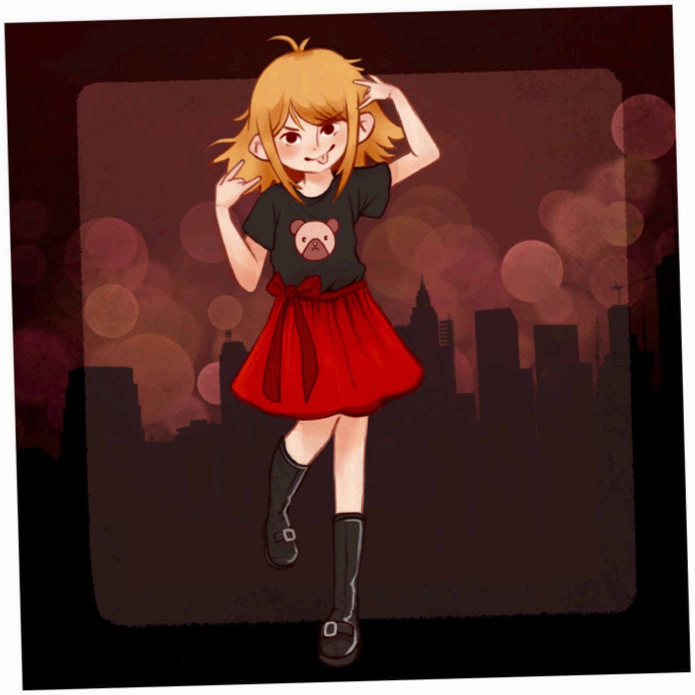
"Are you ready for the greatest outfit you'll ever see?"

"I'm ready, Junky-o." Hajime chuckled in an attempt to soften the blow. "That's your new nickname now. I'm not artsy like Angie, so it's not as good as yours."

There was a moment of silence before it was broken by an overdramatic laugh.

"Oh Ham-jam, you're kind of a weirdo! But weirdos are pretty funny, so you have that. Just try to come up with a better one soon, okay? Nevermind that now! I think it's time for your mind to be blown. Open your eyes right now before I open them myself!"

Chuckling again, Hajime opened his eyes one more time. Posing in a rock-and-roll-like stance, round three showcased Junko in a black t-shirt with small teddy bear heads as its design, a red velcro wrap skirt, black boots, and a shoulder-length strawberry blonde wig. It wasn't too flashy, too boring, or too stupid; it was just right. Although, it felt like something was missing; something that would better the outfit, if only by a little.



9/10 - Kinda cool!

"Wow, that *is* your bestest outfit ever. It's better than the other two. I think I'll give it an eight. Can I do something with your wig?" Hajime questioned.

"Like what? Are you saying my pretty wig isn't pretty?" Junko retorted, only slightly offended by his question. "Ugh, fine, whatever. What do you want to do with my wig?"

"It looks kind of pretty like that, but I think it would look better if it was in pigtails or something," Hajime stood up and walked over to the dress-up box, digging through its contents before finding a matching pair of teddy bear themed hair ties. They were the kind you could buy from the dollar store and easily dispose of, but its cuteness was still worth more than a dollar. "I think these will work."

"Oh, they look so cute! Good thinking for once, Ham-jam."

"Thanks, I guess. Here, let me do it for you, since you'll probably mess it up."

Hajime took the hair ties and divided the wig into two equal sections, pulling back each one into a separate pigtail. He was an only child, so it's not like he had any sisters to provide minor hair care, but sometimes Chiaki fancied a ponytail. She'd give him one of her hair ties, and he'd pull her hair back into a decent ponytail as she proceeded to fall asleep right then and there. Once he was done, he stepped back to look at his "work." The pigtails were uneven and a bit messy, but looked good otherwise.

"That looks better now. I'm changing my eight to a nine, so good job. You don't look like a booger, and you don't look like rainbow barf. You look kind of cool." Hajime complimented, giving her a thumbs-up.

"Aw, you're too nice, thank you! I couldn't have done it without my judge. This was tons and tons of fun! Look out, everyone: Junko Enoshima is going to rule the world one day!" Junko did her rock-and-roll pose again, giggling before suddenly turning to Hajime. "Let's, like, do this again tomorrow at free time!"

“Wait, what?”

“I, Junko, have made up my mind. You’ll be my judge forever and ever!” Junko held out her hand for a handshake.

“I can’t say “no,” can I?”

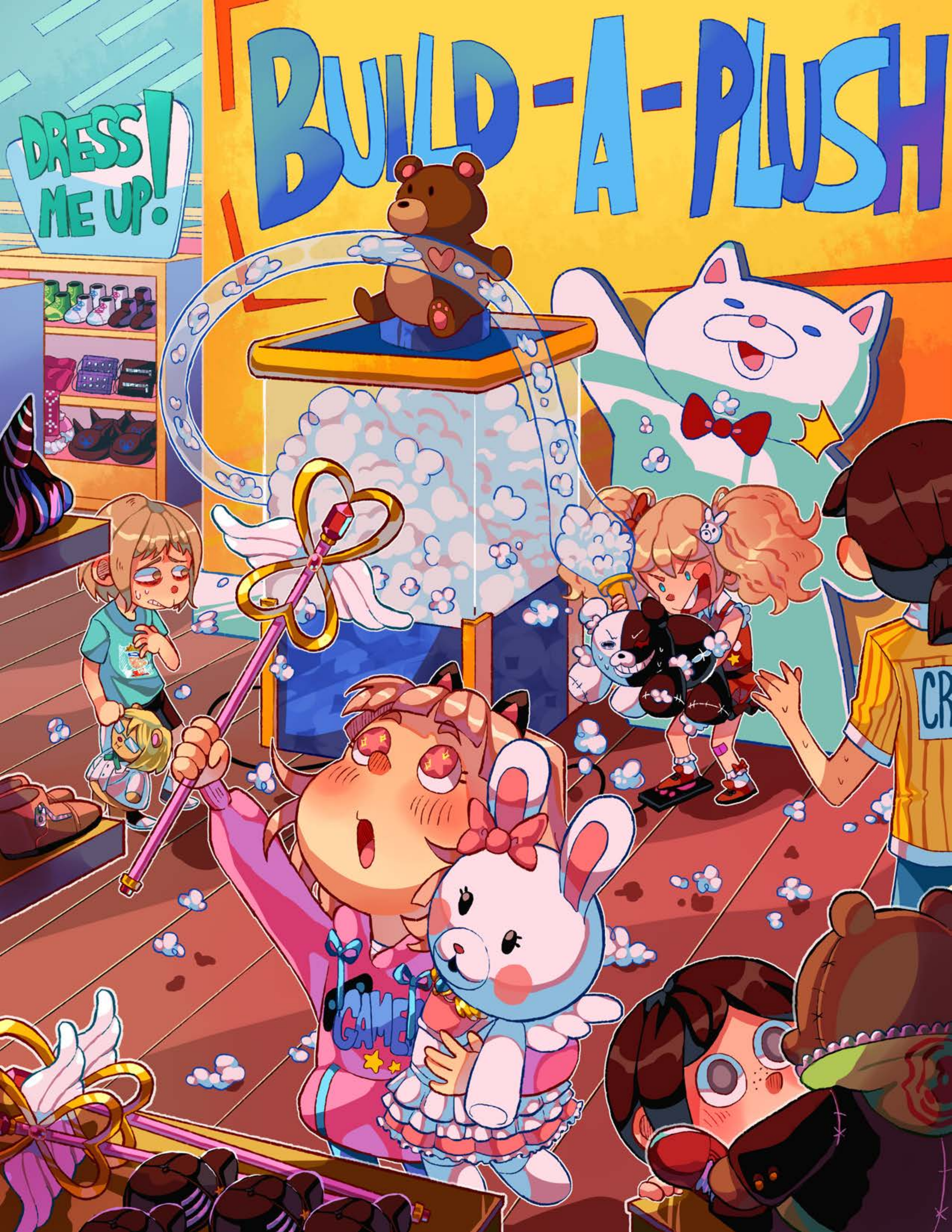
“You can, but if you do, I’ll cry a lot and tell the teacher.”

“No, don’t!” Hajime blurted out. He crossed his arms, putting some thought into it before coming to a final decision. He grabbed and shook Junko’s hand. “Tch, I was gonna say “yes” anyway. Fine, I’ll be your judge and do dumb judge stuff. Let’s do another dumb show tomorrow, okay?”

“I can’t wait, Ham-jam! Or should I say… *Judge* Ham-jam!”

That day, Hajime sealed his fate in exchange for an odd friendship with an odd girl. However, by the end of their free time, he didn’t mind all that much, and he, too, couldn’t wait for Junko Enoshima’s next fashion show. But alas, like many things, he would never admit those things out loud. Not for a while, at the very least.

He never got that orange juice box though. He let it slide this time, but next time, he *was* going to get her orange juice box. And he would savor every last sugary tangy drop of it.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DRESS ME UP!
GAME
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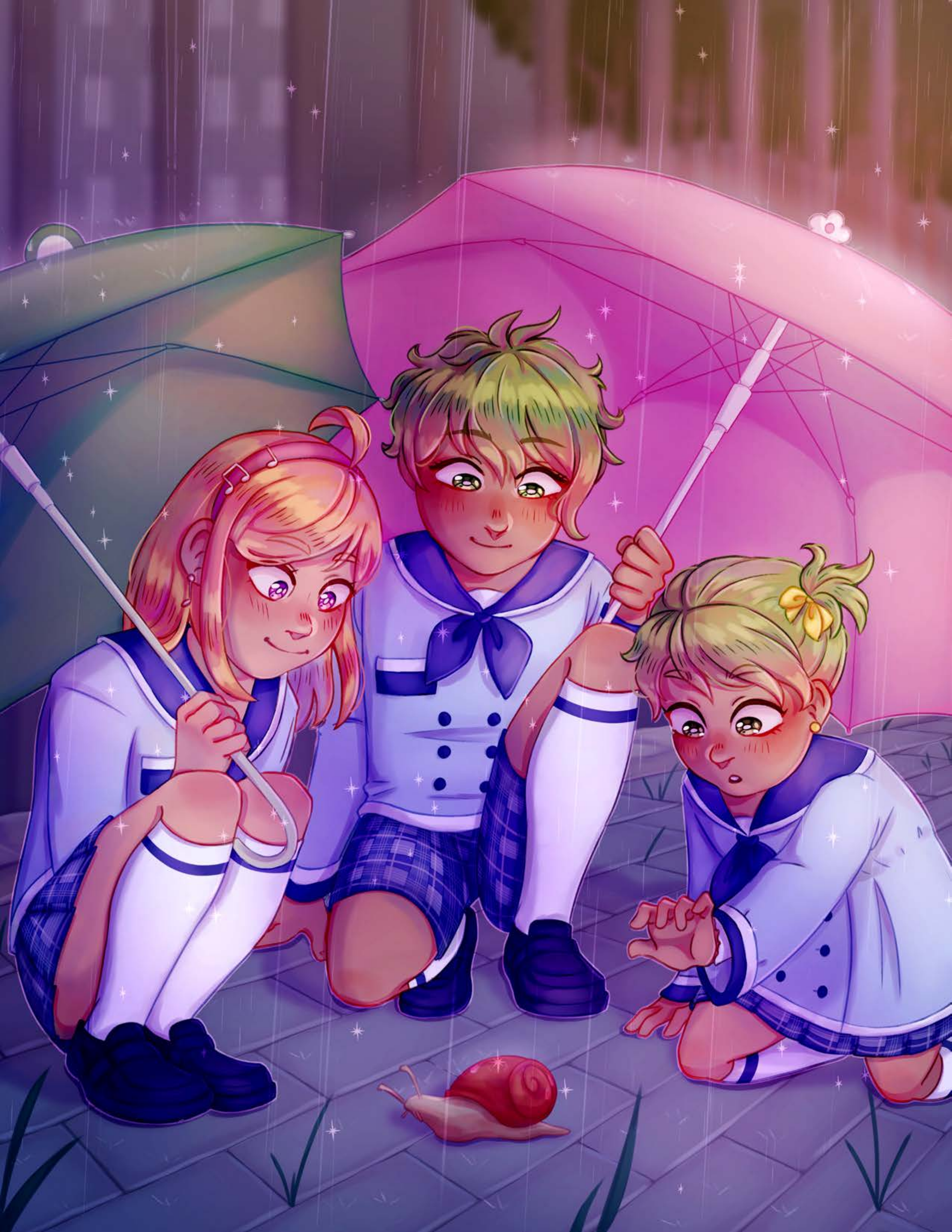

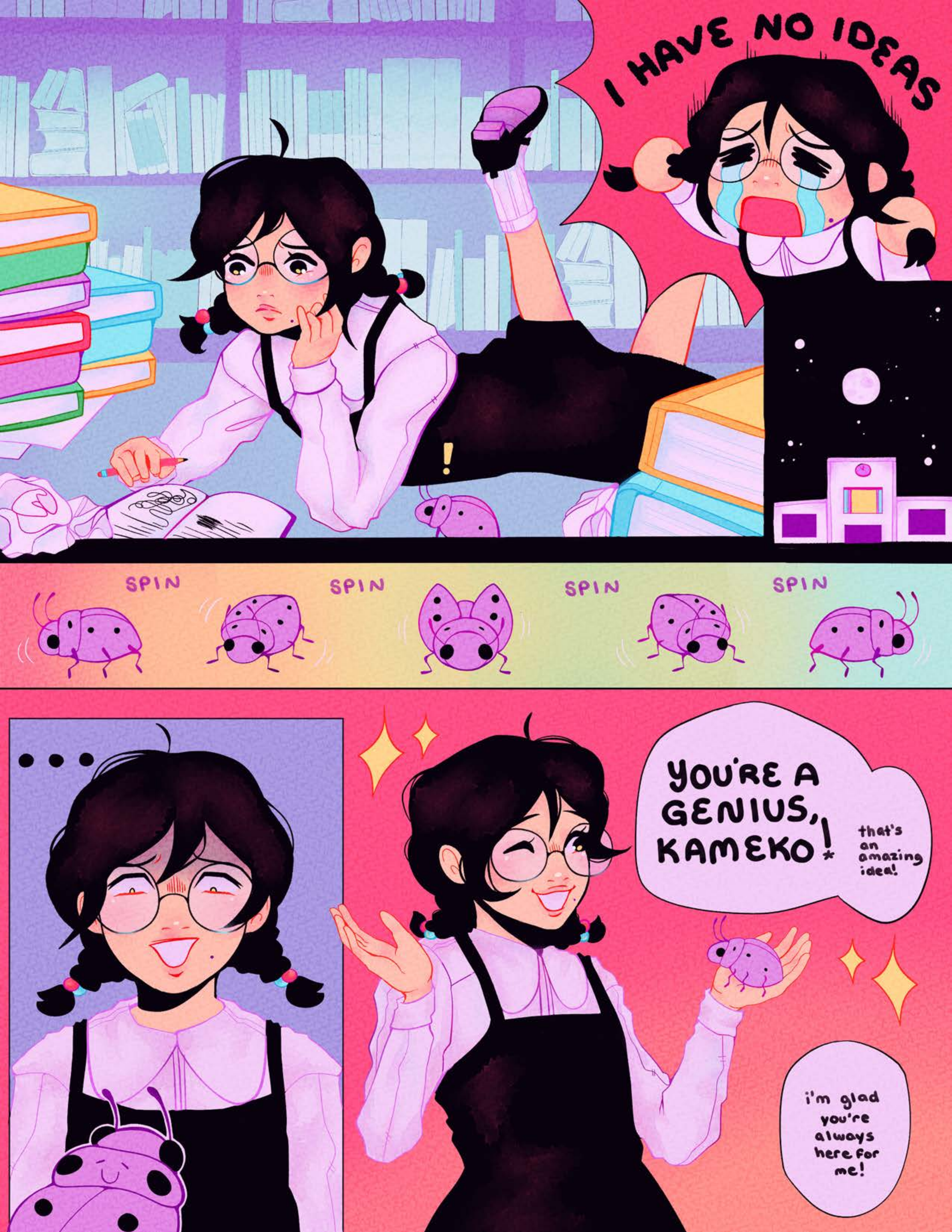
I HAVE NO IDEAS
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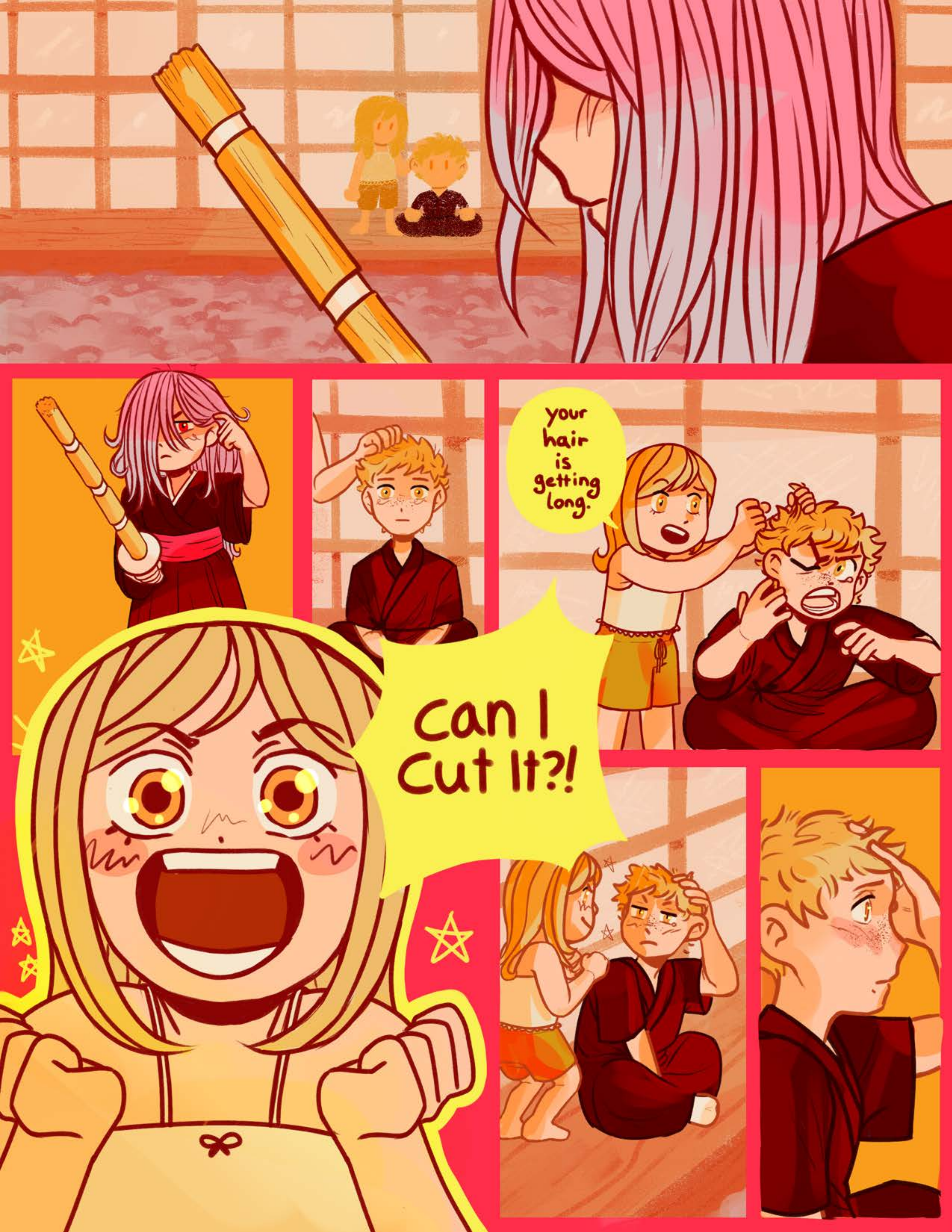
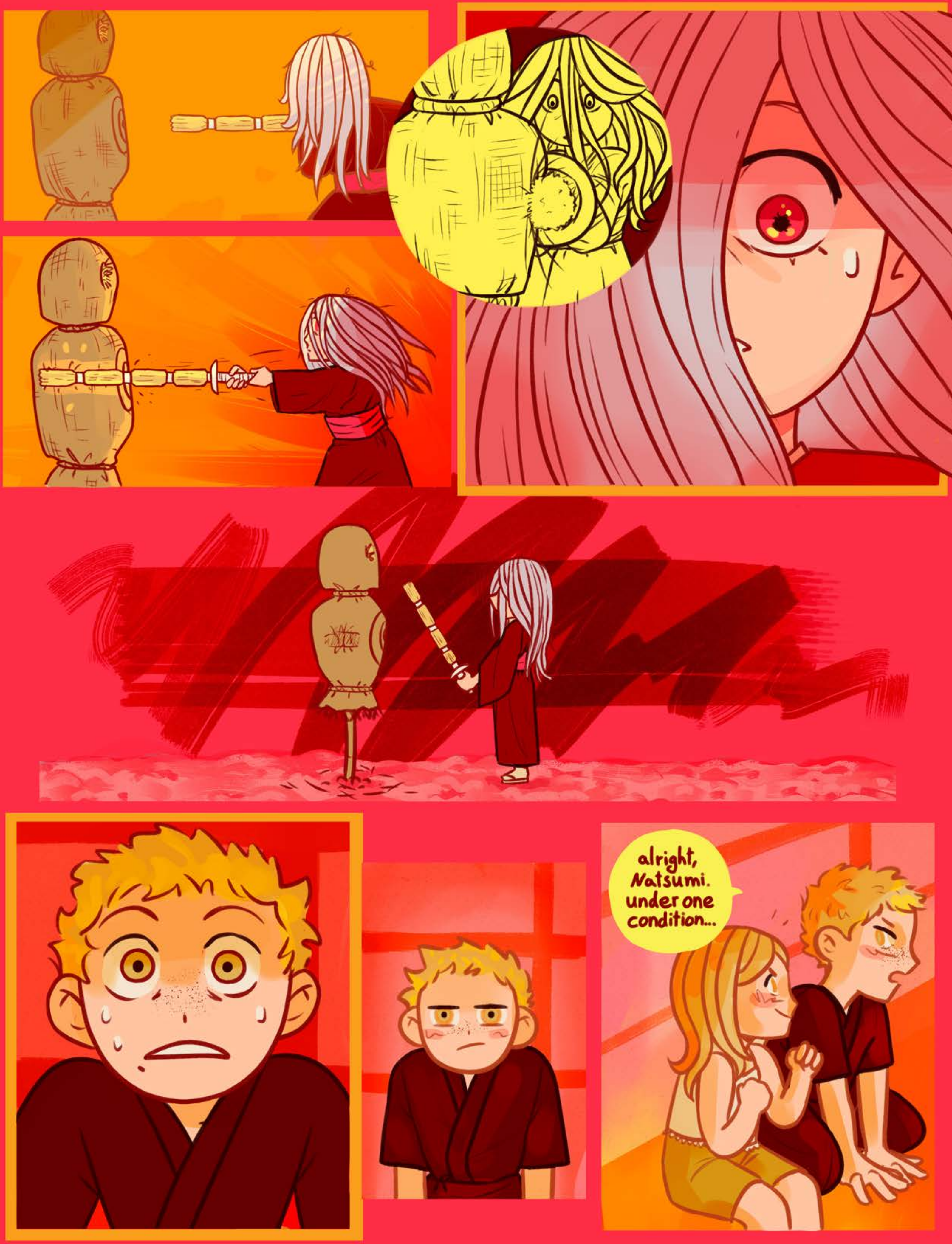
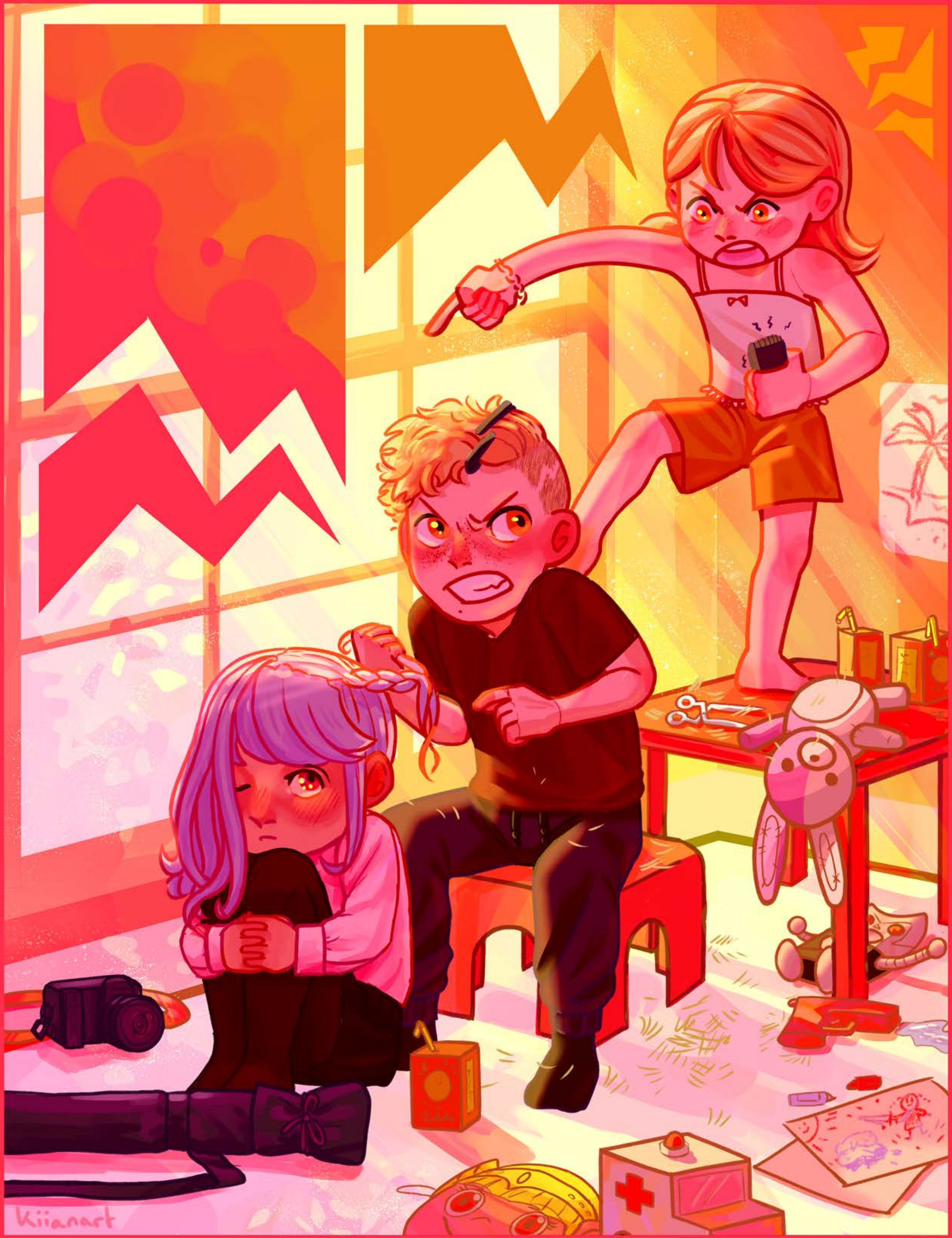
YOU'RE A GENIUS, KAMEKO!*
that's an amazing idea!
i'm glad you're always here for me!


your hair is getting long.
Can I Cut It?!


alright, Natsumi. under one condition...


Kiianart

Bad Luck, Good Luck

Avychu

avychu ovluda

It had been a while since Chiaki visited the school infirmary.

The last time she had set foot here, it was still mid-autumn, some time before the yearly sports festival. After Mikan tripped over herself during one of their practice games, Chiaki and a few others took it upon themselves to bring her to the infirmary, all in a panic as their friend wailed wildly.

From what she could remember, Mikan had barely gotten scratches from the incident, but the fact that she looked like she was in extreme pain was enough to scare the class. There were barely any accidents after that.

The infirmary was dreadful, even to her. She wouldn't pretend that the sharp, permeating smell of rubbing alcohol wasn't nauseating to her, nor would she think that the late afternoon sun, filtering through the dusty blinds was enough to illuminate the whole infirmary. The place alone was enough to premise a horror video game.

Even so, Chiaki realized that looking scared wasn't going to get things done. She couldn't afford to be afraid, especially if how she felt would also affect the wounded boy beside her. And so, when the two classmates finally settled down on the stuffy mattress, Chiaki only relieved a quiet sigh.

"I'm okay, Chiaki. Really."

Noticing her reaction, Nagito insists with an apologetic smile, shifting nervously on the infirmary bed just to ensure a comfortable distance between them. It was bad enough that Chiaki caught him playing on the swings after school, let alone staying to take care of his knee wound. He was scared that he had bothered her too much.

“It doesn’t really hurt, and… and I can take care of it.”

“Ah. That’s obviously a lie.”

Chiaki, lethargic as usual, finally decided on a response, shaking her head then frowning afterwards. Beyond Nagito’s smile, it was obvious that he was in pain.

The wound spoke for itself; Nagito’s pale fingers ghosted over the wound and the trickling red on his knee, subtly attempting to hide them from his classmate’s view. But the gash was large enough to escape his cover. Chiaki wanted to cry for him, almost.

“I’ll be back, okay? I’ll just get Miss Yukizome,” she added worriedly. It was clear that this was a job for the adults, even if she knew how to use scissors and bandages. She could make a mistake and hurt Nagito if she treated his wound.

Meeting Nagito’s round, gray eyes one last time, she stood up from the bed and made her exit, hopefully reaching Miss Yukizome’s office before the bleeding got any worse.

Or so she planned. Before she could walk out, a hand suddenly grabbed at her arm, tight and so surprising that she jumped out of fright. With furrowed eyebrows, Chiaki turned and saw Nagito clutching her arm, seemingly wanting to stop her.

“Nagito…?”

“Ah…! Sorry, that’s…” he trailed off nervously, still holding onto her. Then, after a momentary pause, he added, “Is it okay if you don’t? I don’t want to bother her.”

Confused, Chiaki looked at him in concern. She didn’t really get why he’s stopping her when Miss Yukizome could’ve easily treated his wound by now. Wouldn’t it be better to feel less pain?

However, before she could protest, *something* happened.

Somehow, the brown-haired boy had seemed more pitiful than ever. Tears, though not obvious at first, welled in his eyes, hand slightly trembling as he held desperately at Chiaki’s forearm. He didn’t seem to be aware of how he looked at that moment.

With a soft sigh, she relented, placing a hand on his and smiling at him gently.

“Okay, I’ll stay. Just don’t blame me if I make a mistake.”

Nagito, whose pitiful countenance was quickly replaced by a cheerful smile, nodded before beaming weakly. “Thank you.”

The next few minutes were quiet and awkward as Chiaki, who sat on a stool facing the bed, disinfected his knee wound. Although it was obvious that the alcohol was painfully stinging his skin, she appreciated that he was trying to hold still, only wincing twice. It was vastly different from how her other classmates would react, including her. She’s surprised that he is this strong and mature.

Nagito isn’t really a close friend of hers, but she’d seen him enough to know him a little bit. He was usually alone in class and recess, sitting at the back of the classroom and keeping to himself. However, when he did speak, he was respectful and polite. That was the extent of her knowledge about him though, so why he was so affected by the idea of being alone in the infirmary, much less why he had no friends in general, was beyond Chiaki.

Curiosity getting the better of her, she decided to ask him right after disinfecting the wound, looking up to face her classmate.

“Nagito, are you afraid of ghosts?”

For the first time since he asked her to stay, Chiaki’s inquiring eyes met Nagito’s widened ones, seemingly surprised by the sudden question.

“Um…” He choked out a quick laugh, tilting his head. “No? Ghosts aren’t real.”

“Huh? Then why did you want me to stay in the infirmary?“ Chiaki returned his confusion, not really getting it. Was it the dark that he was afraid of?

“I…. That’s not it.”

He stopped, seeming to confuse himself as well. While she waited for him to elaborate, she took the roll of fresh gauze from the bedside. She clumsily wrapped the fabric around his knee, red bleeding through the white as she rolled it some more.

When Chiaki was finally done, Nagito bent his knee towards his torso and checked the treated wound. Relieved and in less pain, Nagito smiled meekly again, tracing the surface of the gauze. “Thank you, Chiaki.”

“Mm, no problem,” she replied softly. “But I still want to know. What are you so afraid of, Nagito?”

The boy looked at his wound thoughtfully, unsure of what to say. However, as soon as a moment passed, he finally mustered up the courage to say what had been on his mind.

“People, I guess. They make me nervous, so I’m not really good at talking to them.”

Despite his small smile, a sad look settled on his face. He seemed to be nervous at first, scared of the prospect of revolting Chiaki. But as he confided in her more, he grew more comfortable.

“I think… I cause trouble easily. I try to make friends, but, every time I do, something bad happens to them. Nobody wants to be with someone like me.” He rubbed his arm nervously. He had long since realized that his luck had never been good. Even now, he’s causing trouble for Chiaki, a kind person.

“That’s why I feel so bad, Chiaki. You’re a really good person, but I still got you involved with my bad luck. You could’ve gone home already, you know, but I ruined–”

“Hey. Stop that.” Cutting him off mid-sentence, Chiaki folded her arms, prompting Nagito to halt in surprise. She was definitely not the type to raise her voice, so it drew his attention.

“First of all, you didn’t cause any trouble for me. I chose to help you when you fell. That’s all there is to it. You didn’t make me do anything.”

“But I….”

“I promise that you’re not bothering anyone. Bad luck or not, helping each other is natural. Nobody would’ve just left you there.”

Soon, the determined look on her face toned down into something more gentle. She didn’t understand everything about emotions and Nagito’s feelings, but, if she was certain of one thing, it would be that he’s not as bad as he wants himself to sound. And so, she softened her voice.

“Just so you know, it’s not true that nobody wants to be with you. Hajime and I have been meaning to be friends with you for a while now, we just didn’t know if you’d be comfortable with that.”

“Really? You guys do?” Nagito looked excited for a moment, but his happiness soon dissipated. “I don’t really know…. Actually, I don’t deserve that.”

With narrowed eyes, Chiaki sighed, her childishness resurfacing. “You don’t get to decide that anymore. I won’t let you.”

Nagito looked at her in confusion.

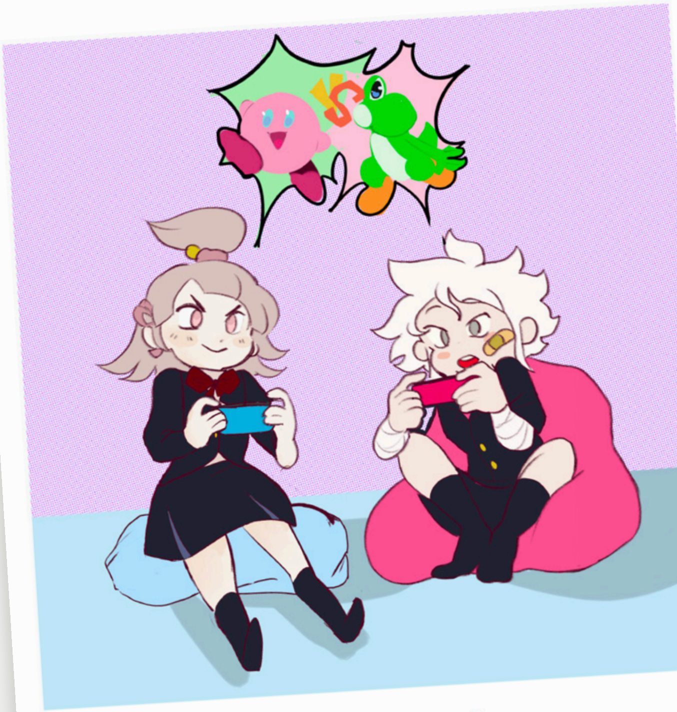
“In fact! Let’s play a video game together. You know, like a friendship pact. You also have to promise that, by playing with me, you won’t say bad stuff about yourself anymore.”

“I’m not sure why I have to do–” Nagito, halted by the glare of Chiaki, changed his choice of words. “Okay, I guess so.”

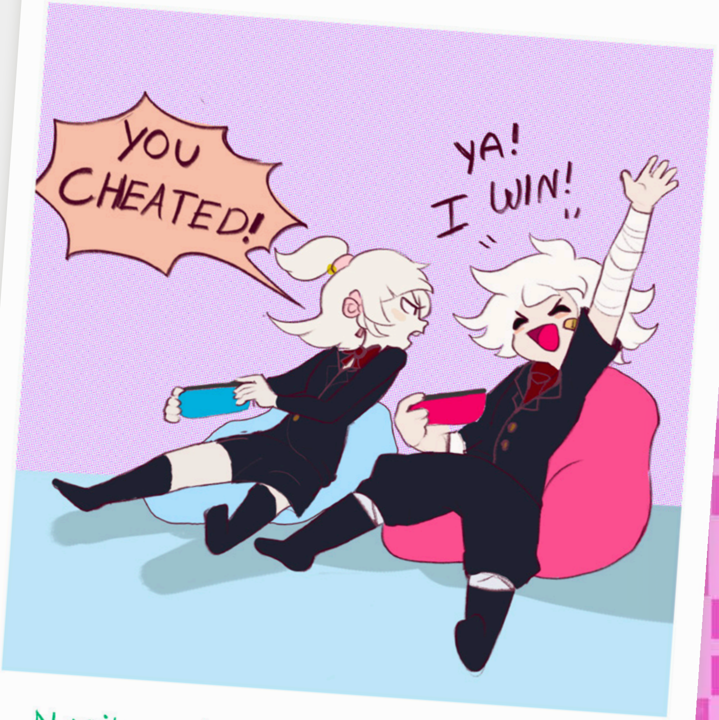
For the rest of the day, the two children played a variety of games on the girl’s portable console, comfortable and at ease as the hours slipped by without notice. Although Chiaki didn’t let him win when she could help it, Nagito enjoyed the time he had in the infirmary. It felt fulfilling to know that there was at least one person who would play with him despite how he saw himself.

In the end, it was already six in the evening when the two friends finally stopped. Ms. Yukizome, who had finished work for the day, finally caught them staying after school, so she sent them home with the school guard to accompany them. Had it not been for her, their gaming surely wouldn’t have ended there.

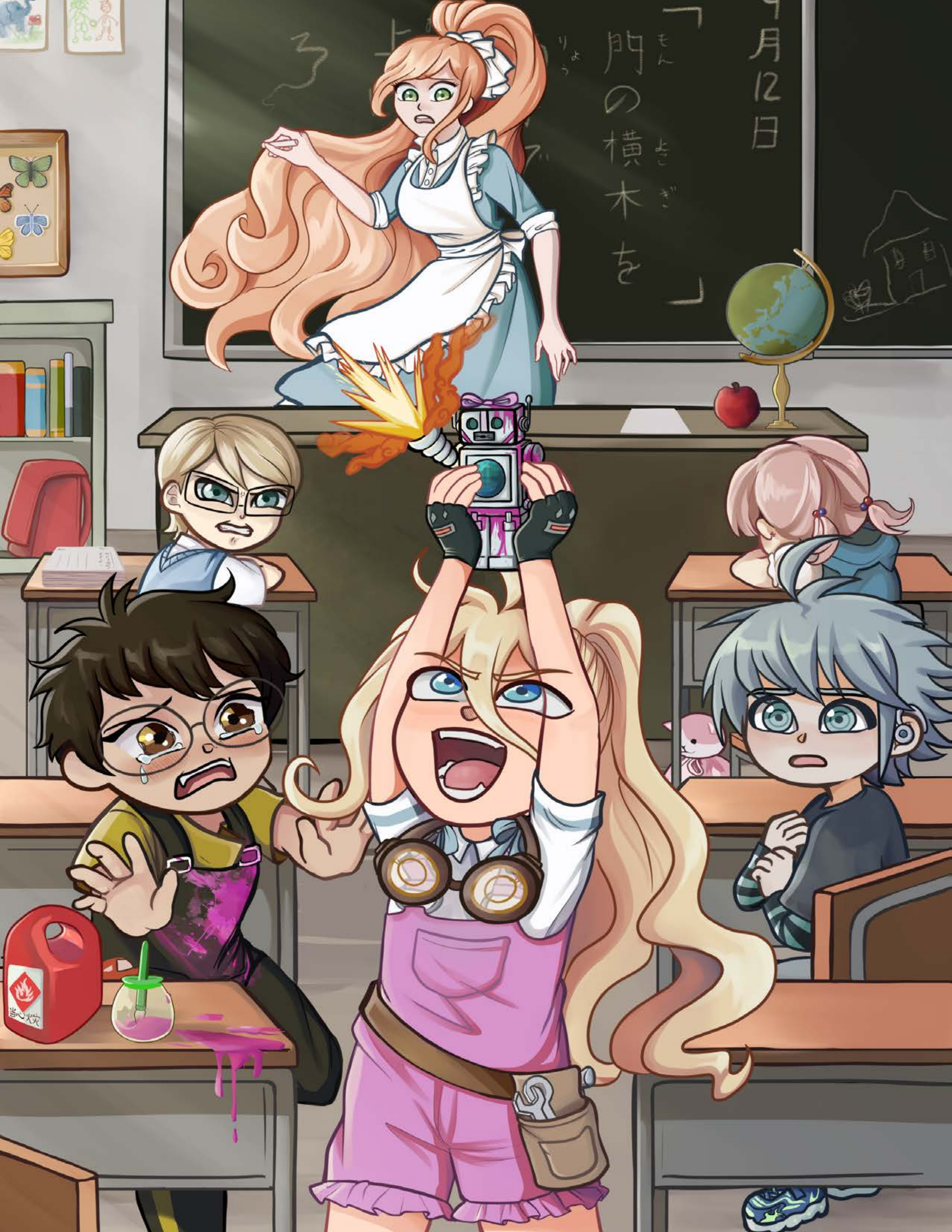
Even then, Nagito’s certain that this playtime with Chiaki won’t be the last. His luck wasn’t so bad after all.

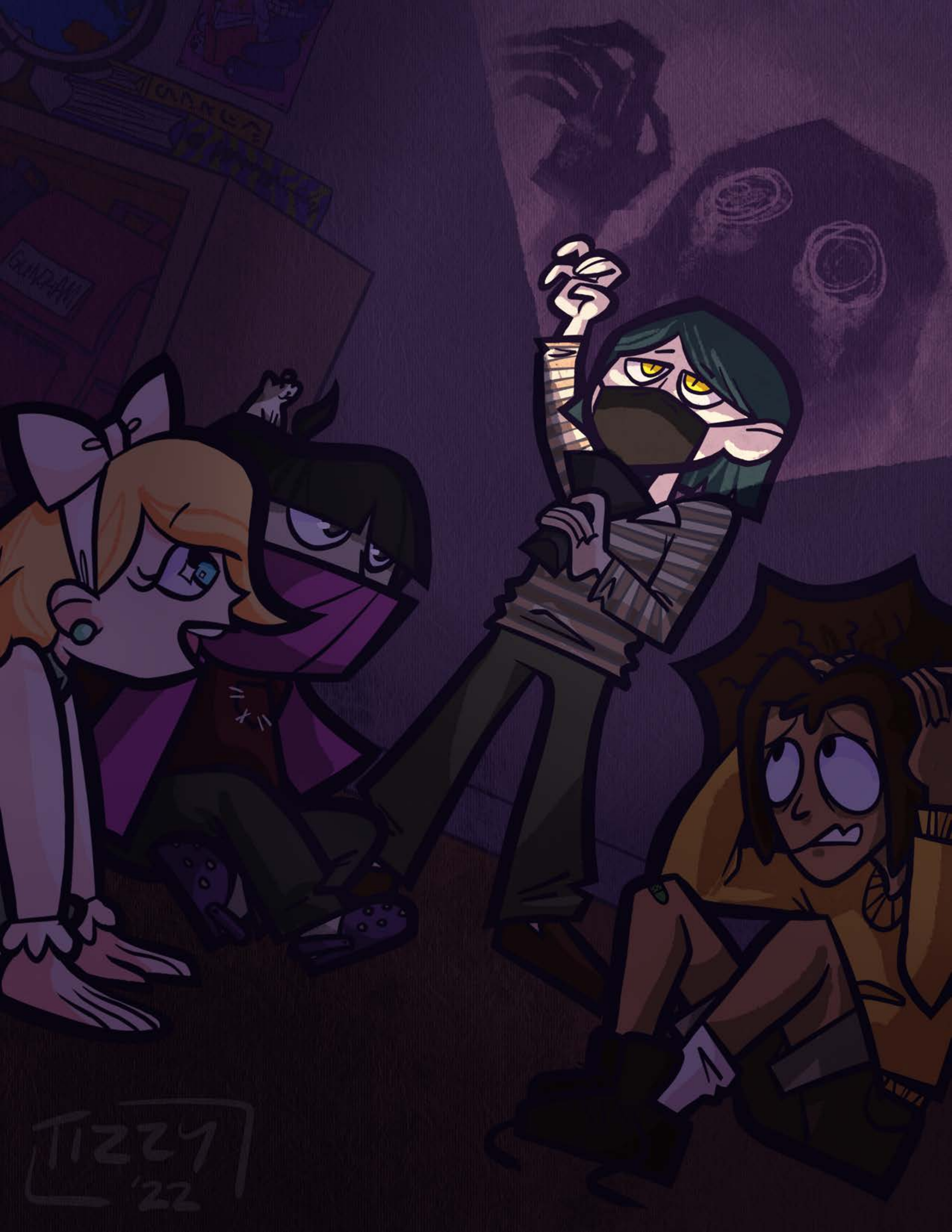


Game on!


YOU CHEATED!
YA! I WIN!

Nagito wins - a flawless victory!


9月12日
「門の横木を」
当心火灾


GUNDAM
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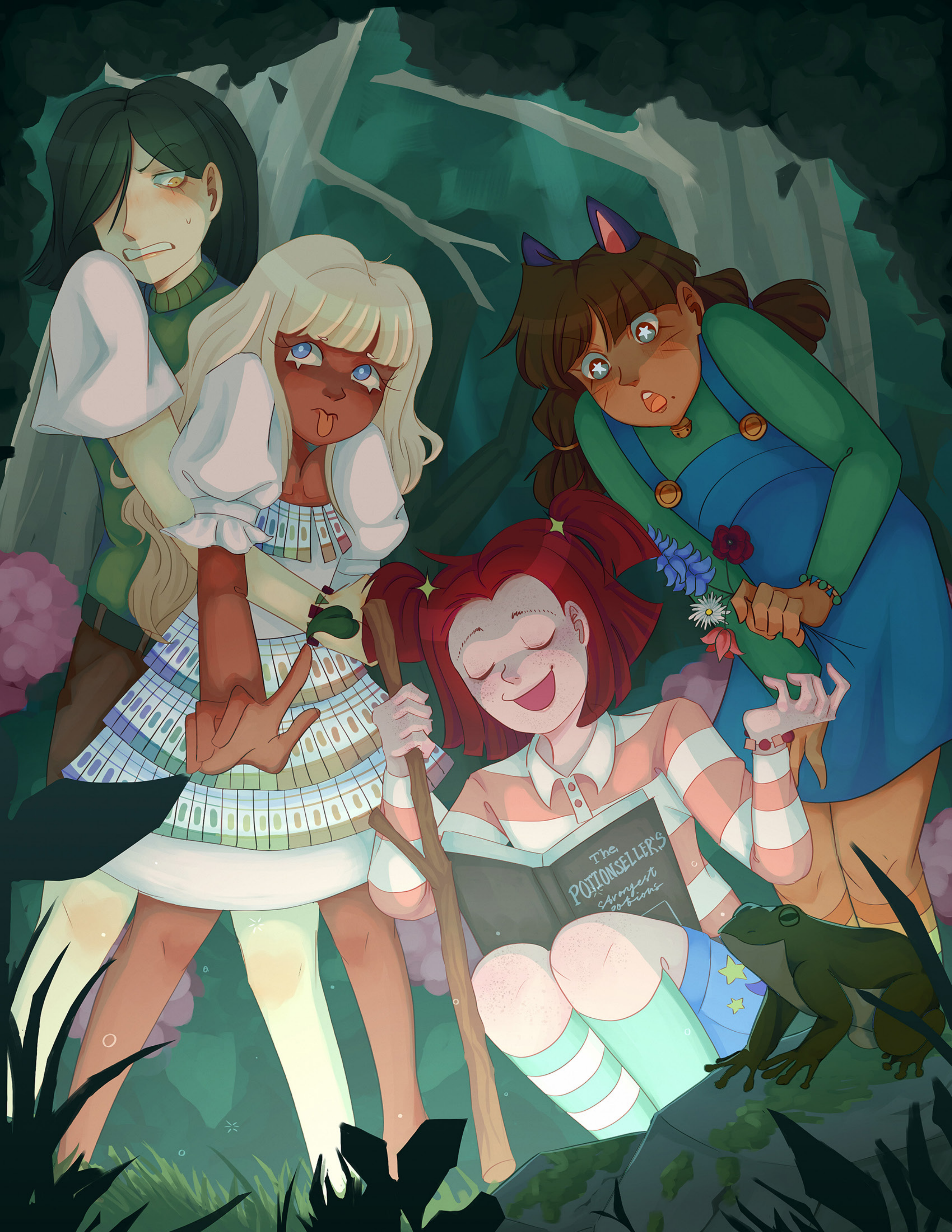
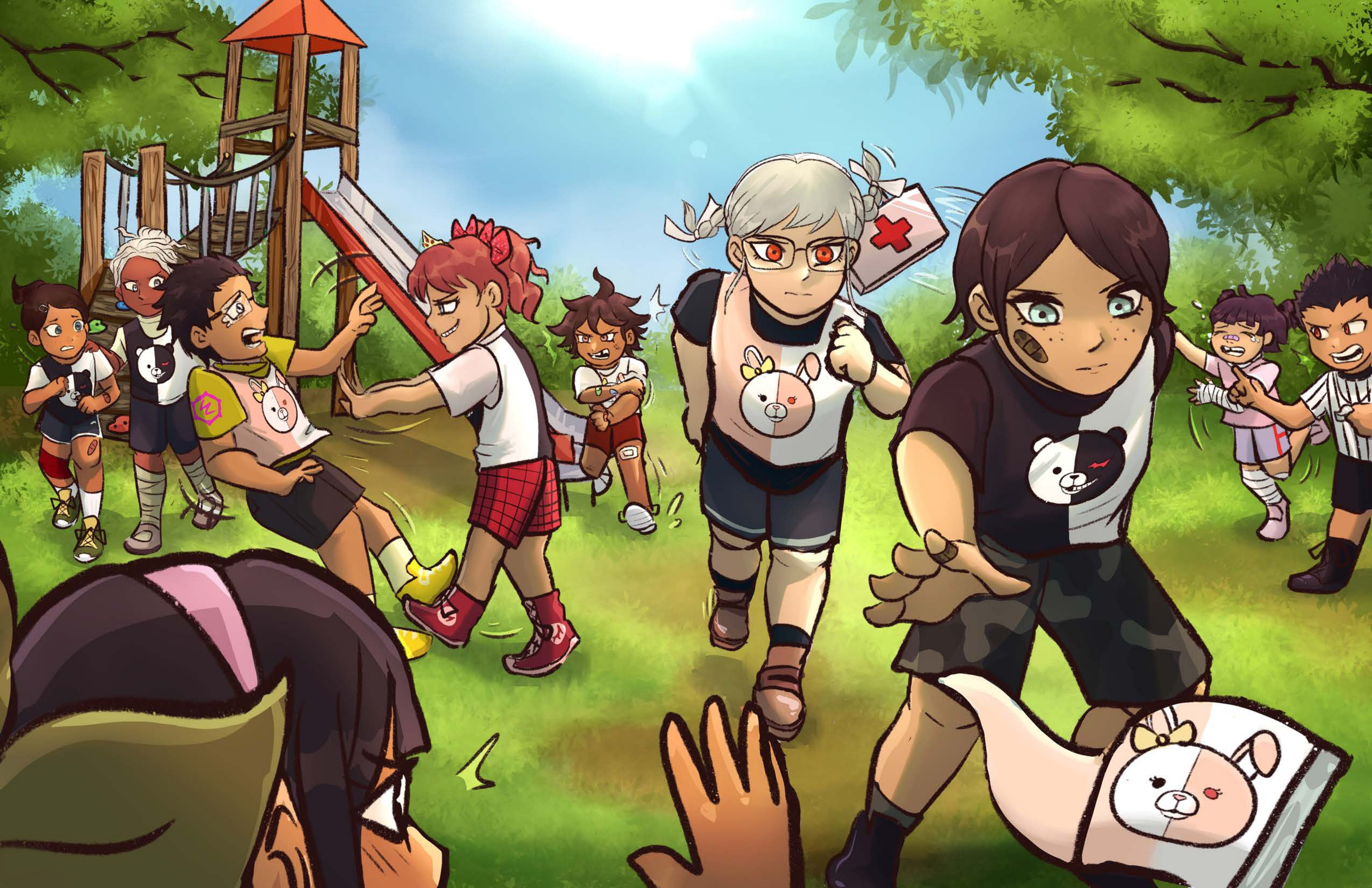

The POTIONSELLER'S
Strongest Potions



Red Eyes and Rodents

By Red

lightredfox

The early afternoon sun shone brightly in the cloudless sky, beating down on the outdoor playground behind the school. The children weren't at all hesitant to bask in the warmth it provided, too youthful to care for the sweat that would stain their shirts. The energetic and athletic ones ran around the small, grassy field, chasing each other around in games of tag that would abruptly change rules whenever they saw fit. Those that were less keen on physical exertion pushed each other on the swing or rode on the rocking horses, taking on the self-imposed challenge of seeing who could go the farthest. There were also kids who didn't bother going outside for their recess, be it due to a lack of interest or the inability to go outside in the first place. They would finish off their snacks indoors and then read the picture books in the small library cubbies, waiting for their classmates to return.

Of all these children, a small girl with grey hair stood to the side as other kids rushed past, standing just close enough to feel the wind blow against her but far enough that she wouldn't be run into. She looked at them as they laughed and tried to grab each other by the shirts, yet her gaze was simply one of boredom, not curiosity.

Her clothes—a simple mascot t-shirt paired with shorts and second-hand shoes, were colored a plain black from top to bottom, with her hair braided into pigtails that were a bit too short to reach past her shoulders. Her eyes were a startling shade of red, and though her youthful gaze could be mistaken as that of a predator, she simply suffered from literal shortsightedness, finding herself squinting to read quite often.

“H-Hey Peko!”

The girl looked over towards the voice to see a boy from her class approaching her with small, shuffling steps. He had non-outstanding short black hair and eyes, and was holding a toy robot that seemed to have been hand-made from masking tape and cardboard. He gave a nervous smile at her, revealing his sharp, shark-like teeth.

“Hi, Kazuichi.”

“Er, me n’ Hajime were wonderin’ if you know where Fuyu is. We didn’t see him all day.”

“He’s at home. He caught a cold.”

“Aw man.” Kazuichi frowned, scratching at a scab that was forming on his lower right arm. “That sucks. Wanted to play ‘robots and dragons’ with him.”

She just gave a small nod, not certain what exactly she was nodding for, and continued to stand still while staring at the boy. The silence made things awkward, but what else was there to say? Kazuichi looked around, unsure if he was to continue saying anything. The way he shrunk back in fear as each second passed didn’t go unnoticed.

“G-Guess I’ll just go.” He mumbled, awkwardly looking down at his feet before running off towards Hajime somewhere near the center of the field. Peko watched Kazuichi as he fled, wondering if he always ran that fast.

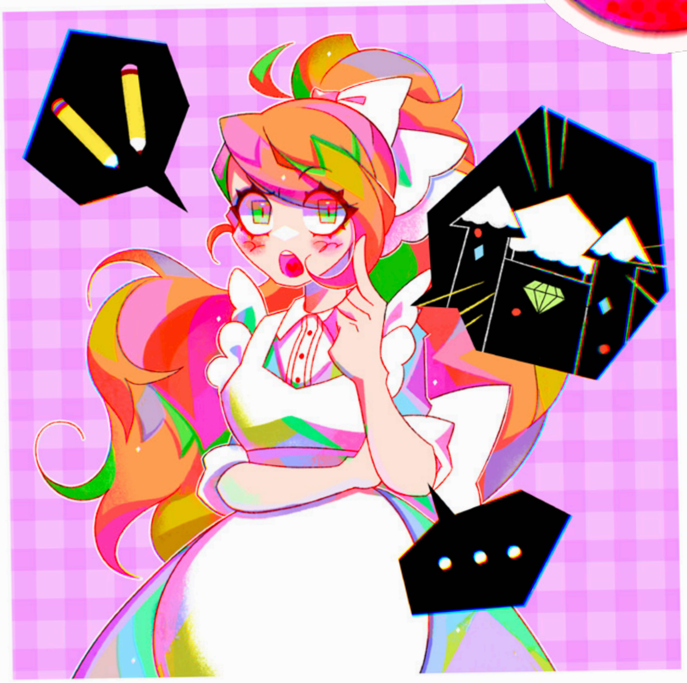
“Peko?”

The girl looked up to see her class teacher and caretaker giving her a curious look, mouth opened slightly in an ‘O’ shape. Another person talking to her right after another was a bit unexpected, especially during recess.

“Yes, Miss Yukizome?”

“I noticed you haven’t been doing anything all recess. Do you not want to play with the others?”

“I don’t know.” She shuffled her legs around a bit, only succeeding in letting the blades of grass tickle the sides of her legs.



Are all these things.....fun?

“Well, maybe you could play in the sandbox? Do you like building castles?”

Peko looked over at the closed square jutting out of the ground that had sand spilling out of it from all sides. Her classmate Sonia was there building a castle like Chisa had suggested, even decorating it with beads and glitter instead of the usual pebbles and sticks. It certainly looked pretty, but it also felt much too refined for her to even gaze upon. She looked back up at Chisa and shook her head. The teacher hummed in thought.

“How about playing with Akane? You’re good at running, aren’t you?”

“She’s too rough. My tooth fell out last time she tackled me.”

“Well then, maybe we can go back inside and color some—”

At that moment, something suddenly sped past the two of them. While Chisa jumped back with a startled look, Peko’s eyes widened as she stared at the blur of brown running further away from them, towards the grassy area of the playground.

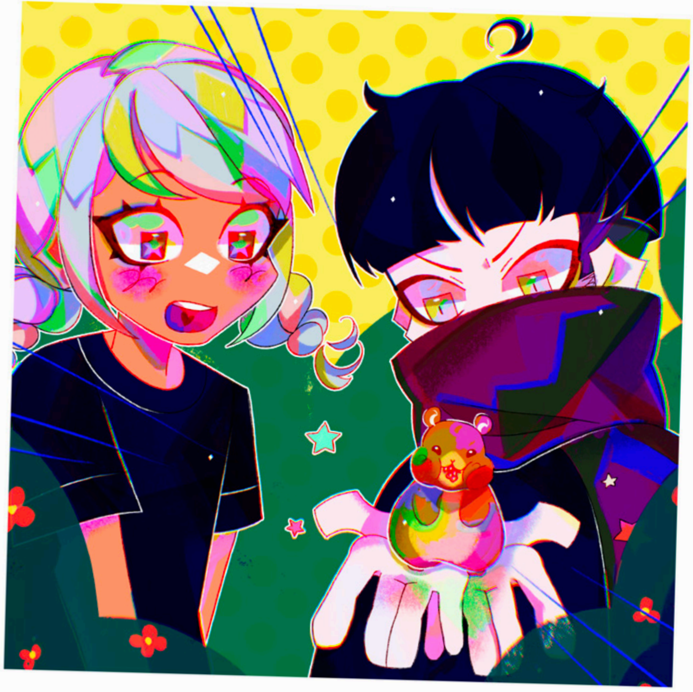
“Oh dear, was that a stray animal? That scared the living daylight out of me!” She placed a hand on her chest and sighed.

“Ah, as I was saying—Peko?”

Peko ignored Chisa’s voice as she ran to chase after the blur. It was only in front of her for a second, but she saw enough to warrant a better look at the animal as it ran off. She definitely didn’t imagine that small, round form, or that fluffy fur. There was a rabbit in the school! For once, she felt excitement coursing through her veins. She absolutely *had* to see it.

Peko caught sight of the blur turning around the corner of the chicken coop, and followed it to reach a small area mostly hidden from view, near the fence that separated their classrooms from the older kids’ garden. There, sitting crouched against the wall was a pale skinned boy with messy black hair. The boy had a gigantic purple scarf wrapped around his neck and chin, obscuring most of his face from view. He seemed to be holding something resembling food above his other hand, lowering it down with a laugh. Peko approached him, and when he heard the footsteps he looked up and visibly shrunk back in fear.

“H-Hi….” He seemed even more nervous than Kazuichi, which was saying quite a lot.



What a cute lil guy...

"Hi…um, have you seen a rabbit?"

"N-No…?" His legs drew up closer to his chest, but that was when something brown poked its head out from above his hands. He panicked and tried to cover it back up, but she had already seen enough to confirm her suspicions. Peko's eyes lit up.

"Y-You're holding it!"

"Oh, this…this isn't a rabbit." He slowly revealed the creature to her. "It's a hamster."

It was even cuter than she could have thought. The hamster had a round body covered in golden brown fur, with stubby arms and legs colored a pale pink. Its nose twitched with each movement of its puffed up cheeks as beady black eyes looked at her. Her mouth twitched upwards, into a smile that she wasn't used to showing at all. She reached a hand out before she could think twice, but the boy quickly covered the animal back up as he curled into a protective stance.

"D-Don't!" He stammered. Fright covered his face, but he still held onto the animal defensively. "It's scared of strangers, you'll make it wanna run away!"

Peko's smile vanished. It was true that animals usually ran away from her, but was she scary enough that she couldn't even look at them without scaring them off? She didn't say anything for a moment, looking down at the ground. The boy realized that she meant no harm, and loosened his grip on the hamster.

"C-Can I look at it, at least?" She seemed shy all of a sudden, with her excitement to see the animal mostly fading into the background. "I promise not to touch it." He hesitated, but when he saw her disappointed look, he let his shoulders relax.

"Yeah, okay…"

She sat down on the grass in a kneeling position, placing her hands on her knees. The boy moved into a criss-cross sitting position, and presented the hamster in his palms. The small rodent looked around at its surroundings with each twitch of its nose, and Peko observed in awe at how adorable it looked just by existing. Too caught up looking at the hamster, she didn't notice that the boy was staring directly at her red eyes, entranced by their color.

"…I like your eyes." He spoke up. "They're cool."

"…Thanks." was her simple response as she twirled around a strand of stray hair that fell from behind her ear, not used to getting complimented on that particular part of her appearance.

"I've always wanted red eyes." The boy continued shyly. They seemed to have swapped positions, the boy focusing solely on the hamster while Peko looked into his eyes to see that they were colored a dull grey.

"Your eyes are nice too. They're like my hair."

She pointed at her head, and he smiled, laughing a bit.

"They are!"

"…Hey, what's your name?" Peko asked.

"G-Gundham…Gundham Tanaka."

"Gun-dam…" She said it aloud, trying to say it right. "Ta-na-ka…okay. My name is Peko Pekoyama."

"Pe-ko Peko…that's a cute name."

Cute? She had been called that by adults before, but hearing it from a kid her age was new. The hamster squeaked in Gundham's hands, and he looked down at it.

"Oh um, Ichi wants to smell you."

"Ichi?"

"That's what I call this hamster. Because it likes strawberries."

Gundham held the hamster up higher to Peko's face, and she leaned in when it began to sniff her. Its whiskers brushed against her nose, and she giggled from how ticklish it felt. The hamster squeaked again before suddenly leaping onto her lap.

“Ah, d-don’t make any sudden movements!”

Peko froze in place, feeling the hamster wriggle around on her legs before it settled down on her shorts, nuzzling up against her finger.

“What do I do?”

“Um…lay your hand down flat.”

Peko did as instructed and laid it down near the hamster. Ichi sniffed at it again, before squeaking and moving onto her palm. Peko felt the way its tiny paws and fur bristled against her skin, and her heart beat faster. She was actually touching an animal. A cute, fluffy animal! Was she in paradise? Just as quickly as the moment had come however, it left just as fast. The loud yet familiar ringing of the class bell resonated throughout the outdoors. Ichi squeaked and scurried away from Peko, darting towards the fence and easily passing through the gaps.

“W-Wait, come back!” She helplessly reached a hand out towards the direction Ichi fled, but it was already gone.

“S-Sorry, it gets scared when the bell rings.” Gundham bowed his head in apology. “Ichi never goes far though. It’ll come back if it smells food.”

“Is that why you’re sitting here?”

“Yeah, it’s near the farming hut.” Gundham explained, reaching behind him to reveal a scratched up plastic lunchbox. “Ichi eats the vegetables in the garden, but if it smells something sweet it’ll want that instead.”

“You seem to know a lot about its habits.”

“Haha, yeah…” He shrunk into his scarf, looking embarrassed. “I like talking with the animals, but the chickens and pigs are always so sad…I like being with Ichi the most. I don’t have a lot of friends.” He muttered that last part, but Peko still picked it up.

“But aren’t we friends now?”

“C-Can I really be your friend?” His eyes lit up, like a dull marble that had just been shined with a cloth.

“Of course. You let me see a fluffy animal, that’s something a friend would do, right?”

“I-I think so?”

“Kids!” Chisa’s voice could be heard in the distance. “Recess is over! Please come back inside!”

“Oh, Miss Yukizome is calling us back.” Peko frowned. Time had seemed to go by so slowly when she was by herself, but when she had finally started talking with someone it was all gone.

“She seems nice…Sir Munakata is always so scary.” Gundham shuddered. “He lectures us if we’re even a little late.”

“I need to go. Can I come back here?”

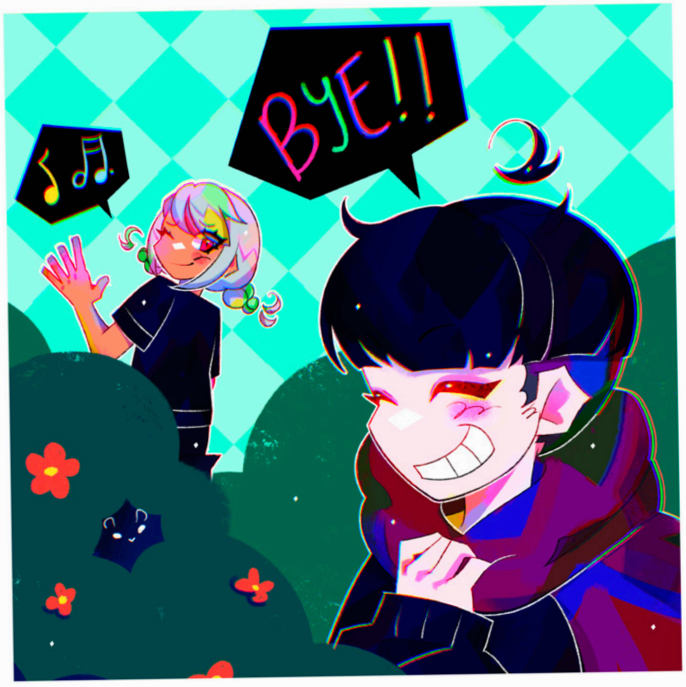
“Y-Yeah! Ichi seemed to like you, too.”

Peko stood up and dusted off the dirt from her legs as best she could. She turned towards the direction of the classrooms, but paused and turned her head to look at Gundham one more time.

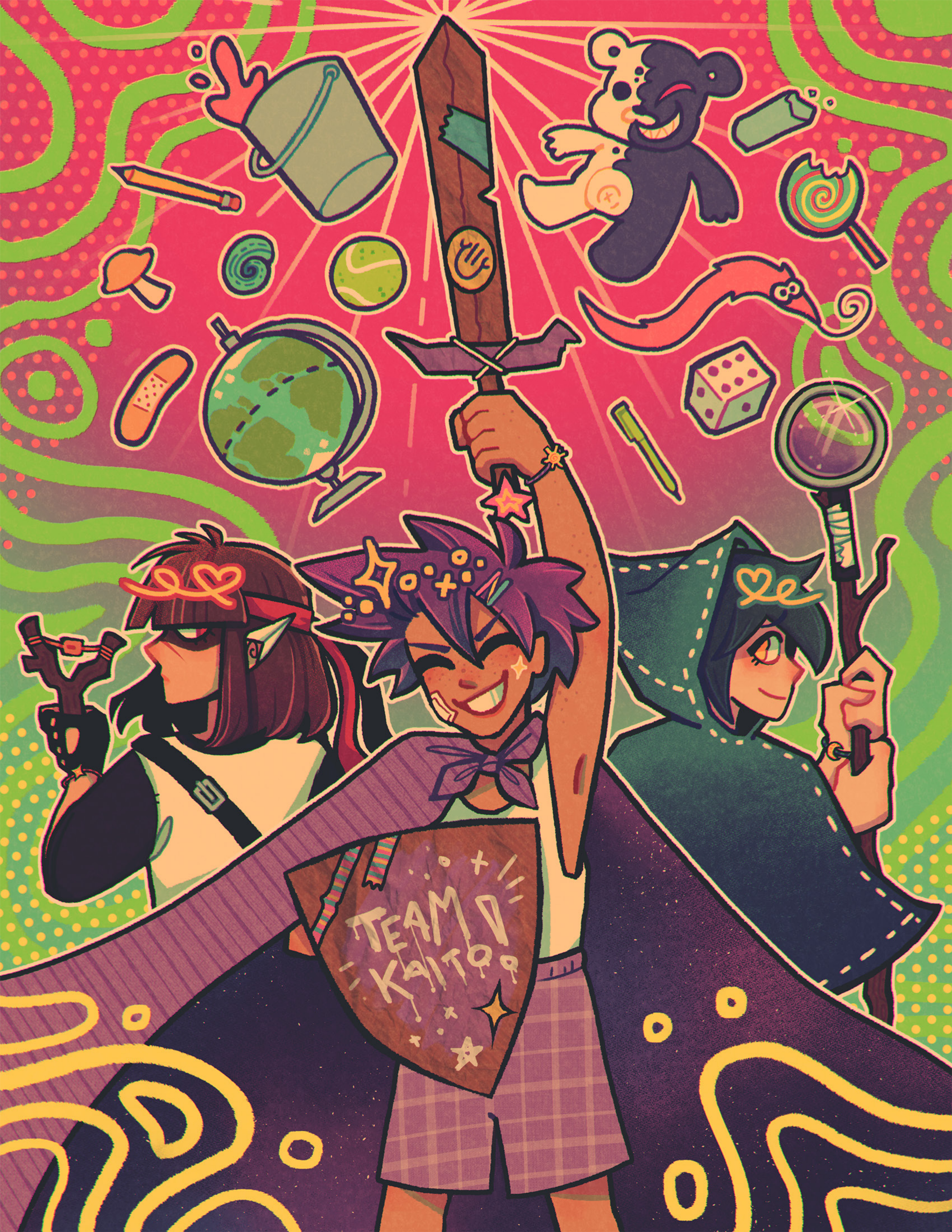
“So then, see you tomorrow?”

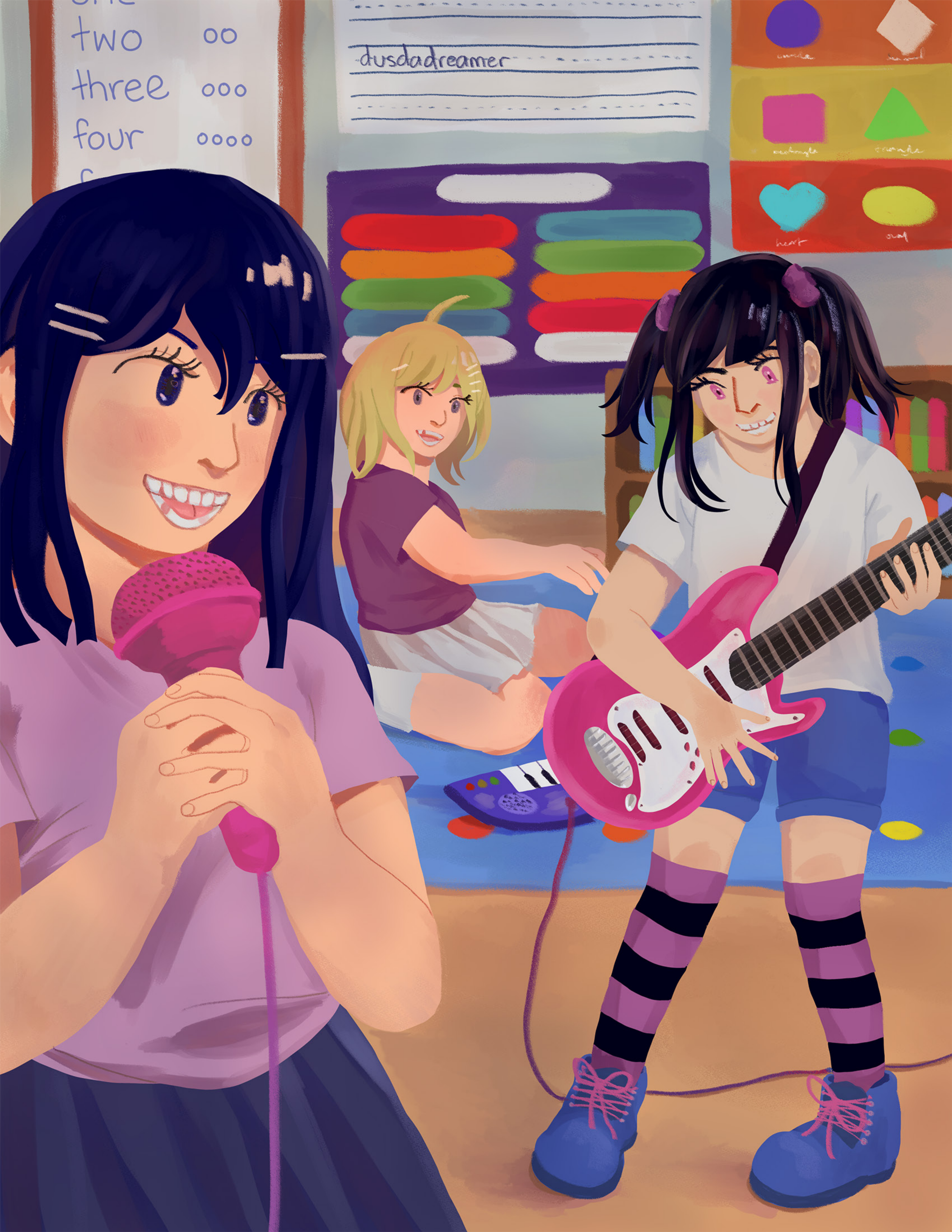
He nodded, pulling his scarf down to properly smile at her, his grin wide enough to reach his ears.

“See you, Peko!”



To new friendships!


TEAM KAITO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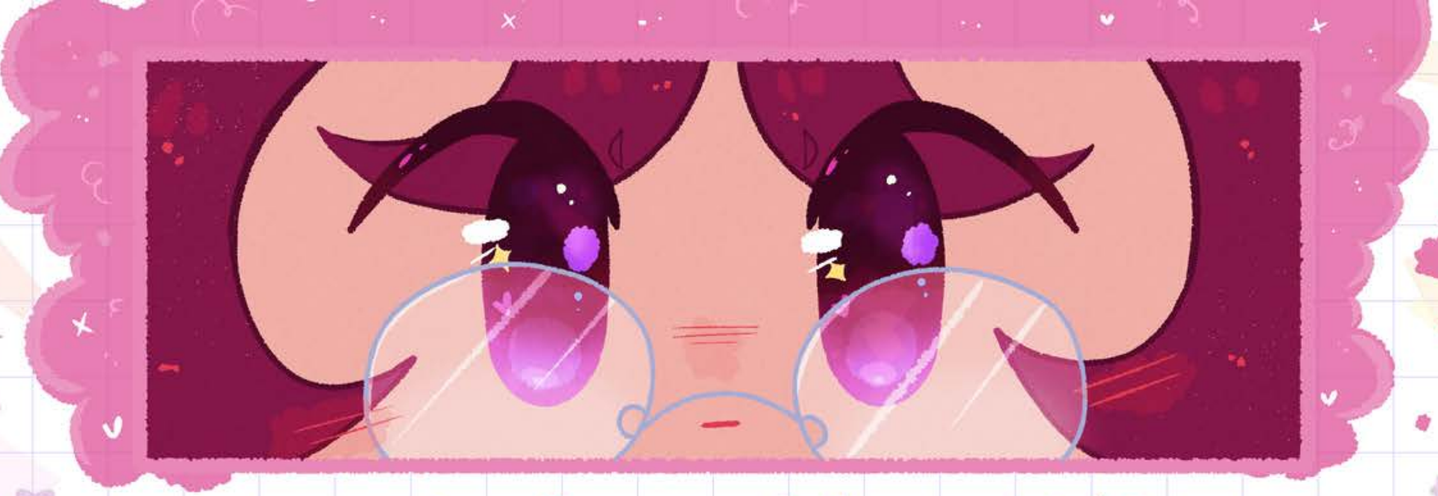
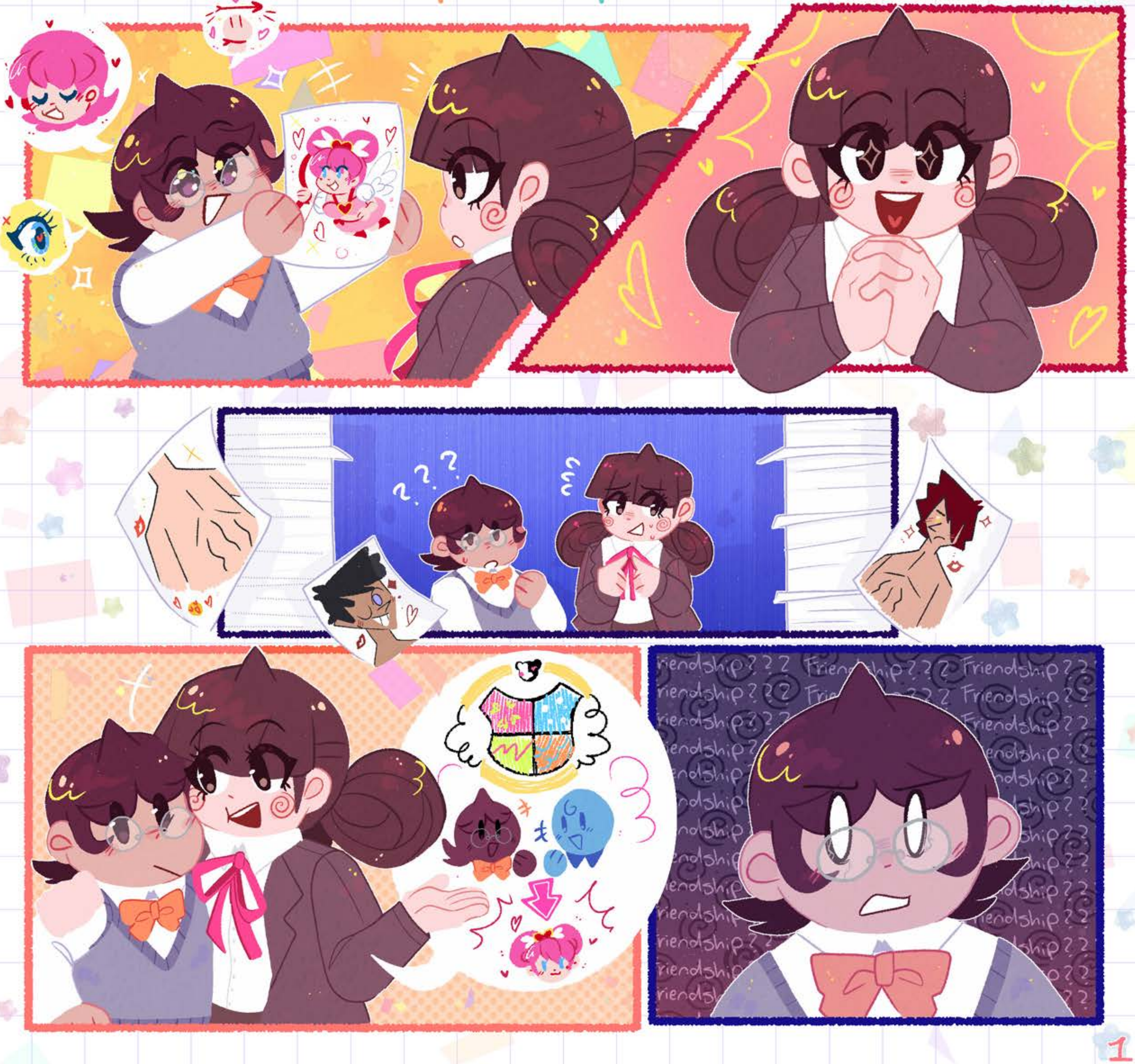
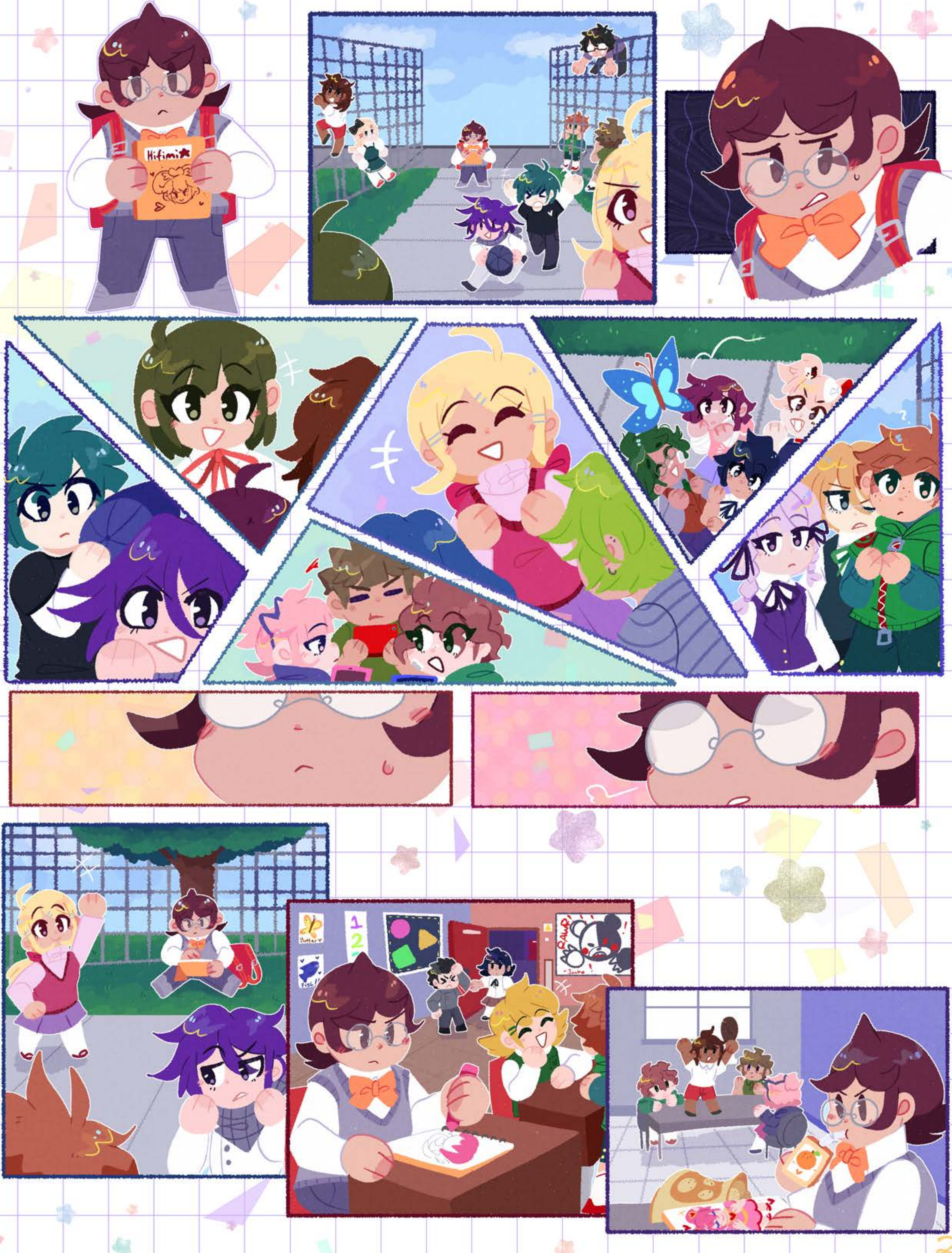
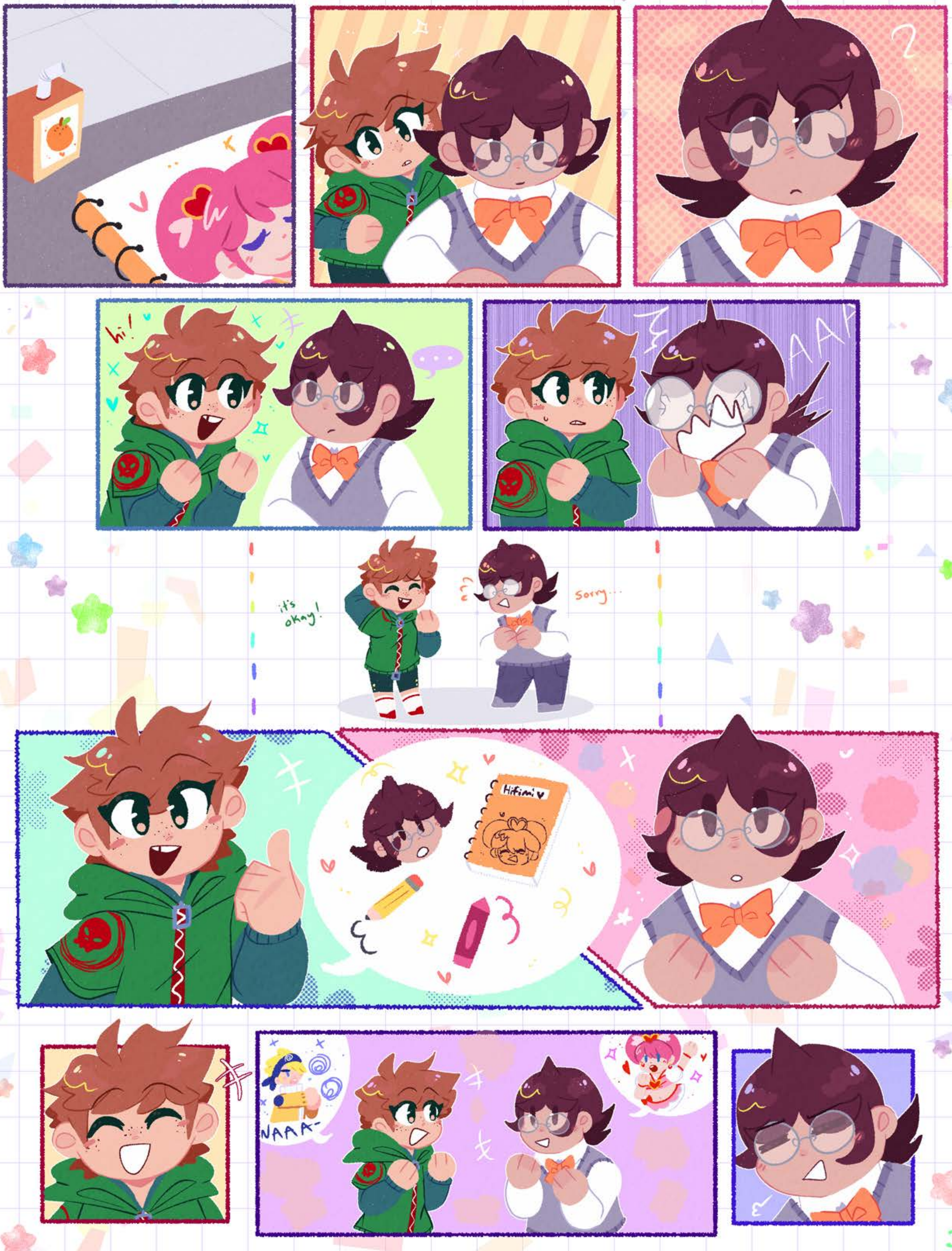
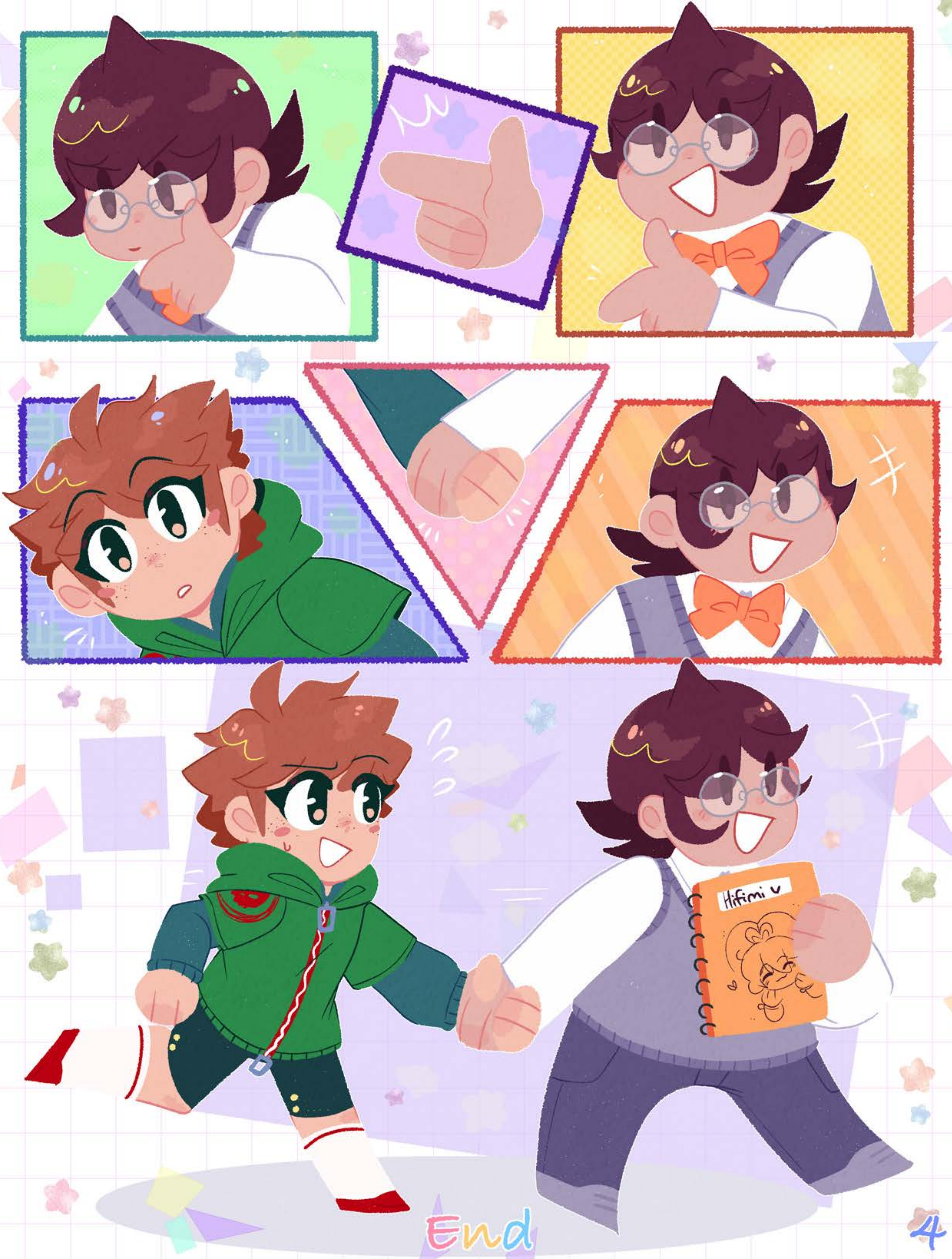


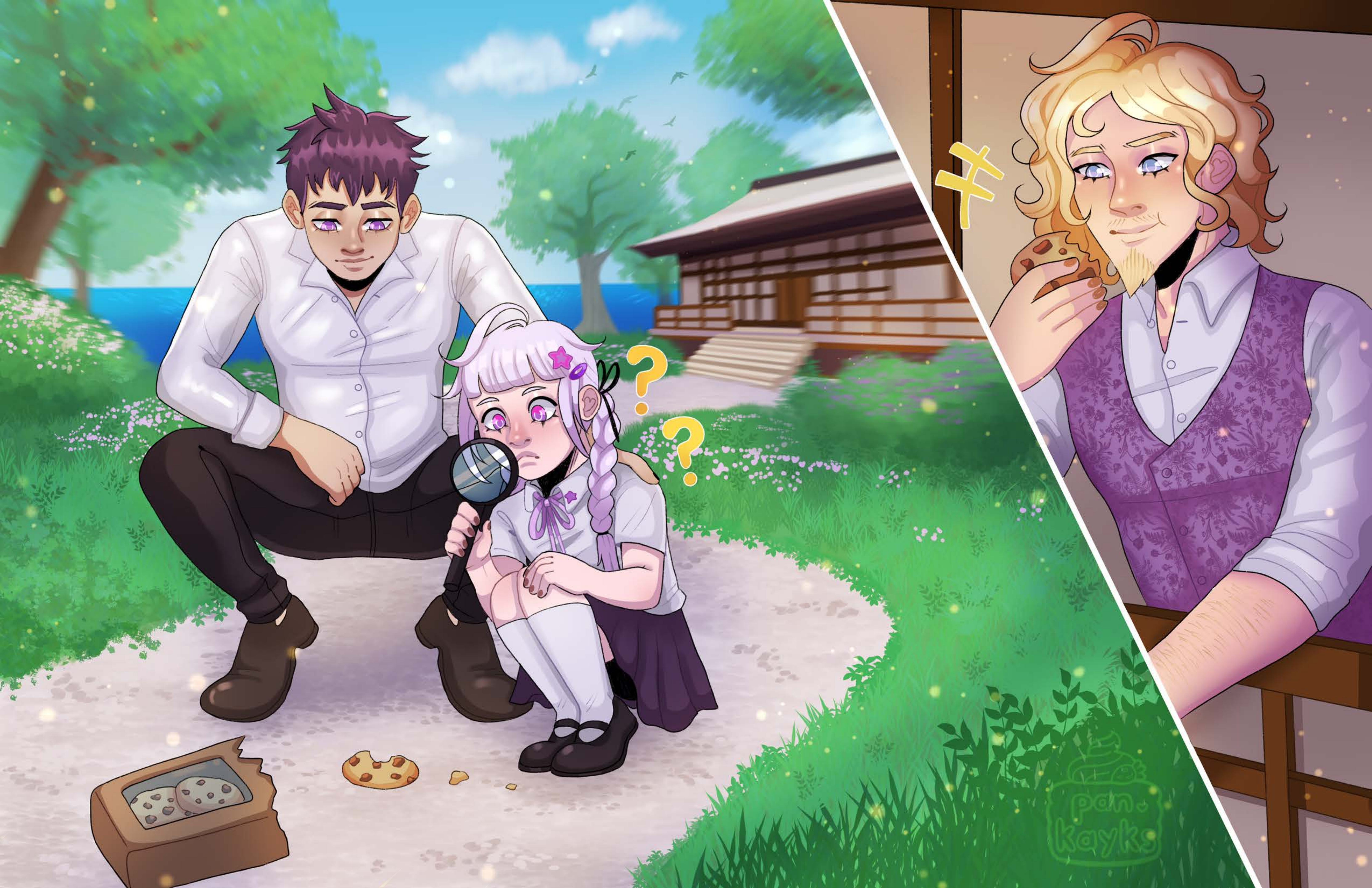
In search for a friend like me


? ? ?
Friendship???


Hifimi★
Butterfly
1
2
Fish!
RAWR!
-Junko-


?
hi!
AAA
it's okay!
sorry...
Hifimi ♥
NAAA-


Hifimi ♥
End



pan.
kayks

How We Saw the Stars

Solstice

mokuhchi mokuhchi-manuscripts

Kaito excitedly bounced on his feet as soon as he saw the last wrapped present. It was huge, too big for him to lift, yet his enthusiasm only grew the longer he looked at it.

“This one’s from me and your father, but you need to be careful with it,” his mom said as she motioned for him to unwrap it. He tore off the wrapping paper as quickly as he could, leaving it in shreds on the floor. As soon as he saw the word ‘telescope,’ his jaw fell to the floor and he ran to hug his mom.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” he repeated.

“Tonight’s a school night, so you won’t be able to use it,” Kaito’s face fell. “*But*, you can use it this weekend.” His expression returned to a wide smile.

“Can I invite Maki over to use it with me? And can she stay over?”

“Sure, but I’m going to have to ask her caretaker.” She quickly glanced at the clock. “And now it’s almost bedtime, so go get ready.” Kaito nodded before he went to his room to change into pajamas, the idea of being able to see the planets through his telescope and point out the constellations he’s learned to Maki swirling in his mind.

The next day before school, after hanging up his backpack, he raced to find Maki. As soon as he spotted her, he ran towards her.

“Maki, Maki!” he shouted, waving his arms. Maki just quirked an eyebrow at him. “Maki! Do you want to stay over at my house this weekend? I got a telescope for my birthday yesterday and wanted to show it to you!”

Maki shrugged. “Yeah, that sound’s fun.”

“Awesome! My mom should be calling your caretaker today!” Kaito said.

“Okay. Thank you for thinking of me.” She gave him a smile, and Kaito couldn’t help but grin back.

Once Kaito’s mom had come to pick him up after school, he practically jumped into the car as he asked, “Did you call yet?” Kaito’s mom couldn’t help but let out a small laugh.

“Yes, I did. Maki is allowed to stay over this weekend.”

“Yes!” Kaito exclaimed. “I’m so excited!”

“Really? I couldn’t tell.” His mom laughed again as she began to drive home.

But the waiting was *gruesome*. Kaito could barely wait for the weekend, and practically spoke about it every other second with his mom. Needless to say, patience wasn’t one of Kaito’s strong suits. But he studied his space books extra hard, trying his best to memorize the constellations that should be visible the night Maki was to come over. He tried his best to make sense of the legends so he could retell them, reading them over and over again to the point where they were practically memorized. And yet, by the time the weekend had arrived, he still felt unprepared.

He had gone to bed under the guidance of the moon, yet awoke at the same time as the sun. He watched it rise from behind his neighbor’s house, and, as soon as sunlight streamed through his windows, he returned to his books to study the constellations. Breakfast and lunch came and went, but, by the evening, Kaito could hardly wait for his friend’s arrival. As soon as Maki was through the door, Kaito grabbed her hand and rushed her into the backyard where his telescope already stood proudly.

They took turns looking at the moon through Kaito’s telescope, discussing the myth of it being made of cheese the whole time. But, once they grew bored of watching the stillness of the moon, they laid on the grass and instead watched the twinkling of the stars.

“That’s the little dipper!” Kaito pointed to a spoon-shaped constellation.

“Where! I can’t see it.” Maki answered, shifting closer to see from the same angle as Kaito.

“Do you see that really bright star?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Follow the shape of it, that’s the little dipper!” Kaito tried to explain, albeit poorly. He traced the outline with his finger as he spoke. “If you follow the north star this way,” Kaito continued to point, “you can see the big dipper too! And if you go this way,” he shifted his hand again, “you can find Cassiopeia!”

“Cassiopeia looks like a set of stairs, I think.”

“Me too!” Kaito couldn’t help but laugh.

“Do you know any other constellations?” Maki asked.

“Well, I know other constellations but I don’t know where they are in the sky, exactly.”

“What are the other constellations?”

“There’s a lot!” Kaito exclaimed. “There’s Capricornus, Canis Major, Canis Minor, Gemini, Pegasus, Orion, Cancer…” He trailed off, trying to think of others he had forgotten.

“There’s a lot of constellations.”

“There’s 87 or 88, I’m pretty sure.”

“Wow, that’s so many! I wonder how they came up with the constellations.”

“The constellations aren’t the shapes, but a section of the sky that they discovered made a shape, I guess? Like, they sectioned the sky and made up constellations from there, I think.”

Maki pointed at a cluster of stars. “That’s the teddy bear constellation, then.”

“There’s no such thing!”

“Well, you said scientists just made them up. So I can make one up too. It’s only fair.”

Kaito thought for a moment, eventually deciding that the logic was sound enough. “Then that’s the telescope constellation!” he said as he pointed to another group of stars next to Maki’s teddy bear.

“And that’s the rain coat constellation.”

“Oh! And that one’s the camera constellation!”

"And I think that one looks like a guitar, so it's the guitar constellation!" They continued to go back and forth, pointing and naming their own constellations.

Eventually, as the moon and stars continued to shift in the sky, Kaito's mom walked out onto the porch steps. "Kaito! Maki! It's time to come inside!"

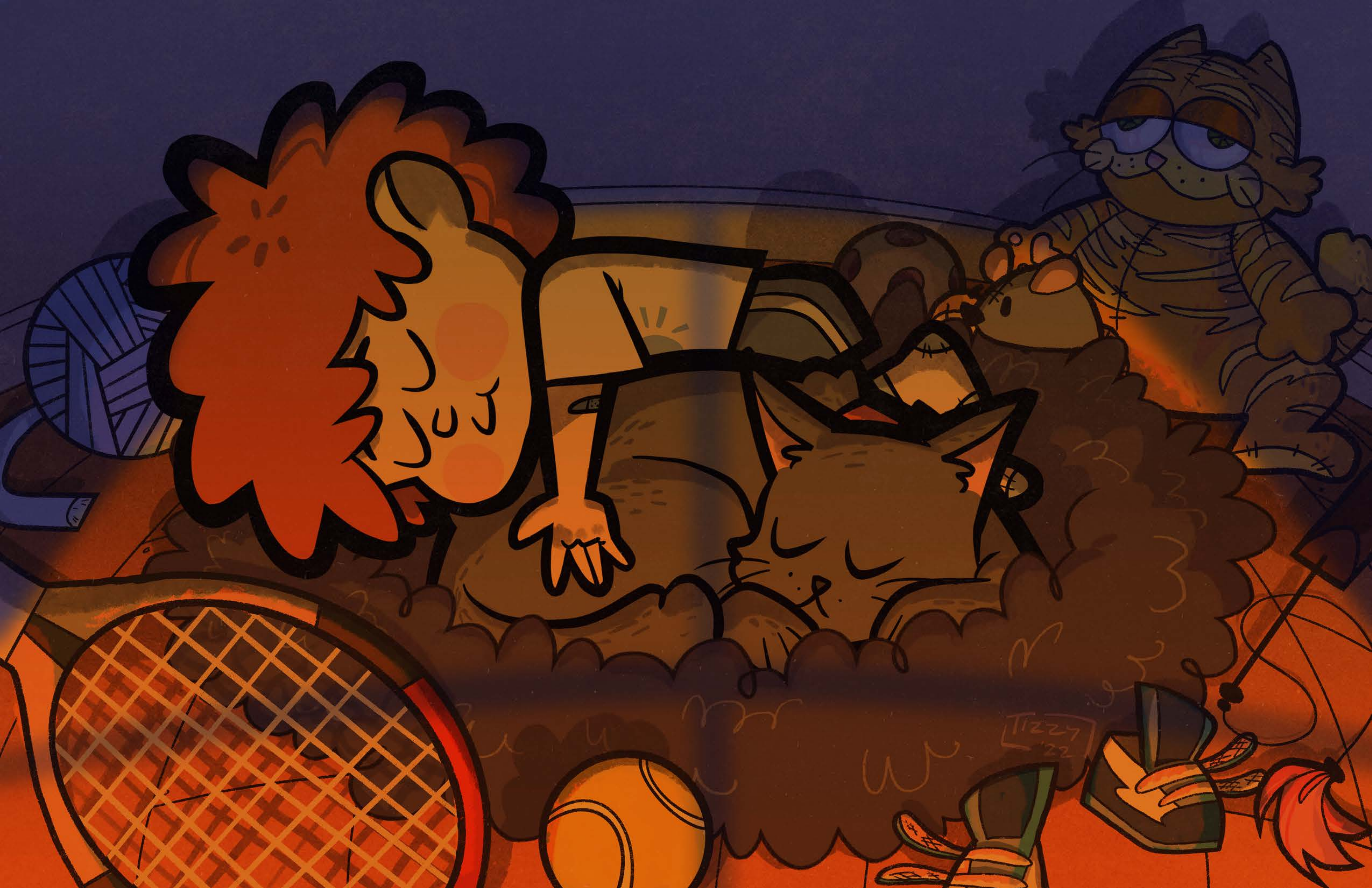
"Already?" Kaito grumbled to himself, disappointment clear on his face.

"It's okay, we can always do this again," Maki said as she stood up.

As the two walked towards his house, Kaito spoke. "One day I'll go to space, and I'll bring you back a star. No! A constellation!"

"You can't bring me a constellation." Maki giggled to herself.

"I'll bring you back something then. Just you wait." The two silently slipped into Kaito's house as the stars winked from above, as if saying goodnight themselves.


Izzy '22

LI'L WONDERS
K1-B0
MALA

Artist Credits

Bou

R0BOU

Zoé

zoep_illustration

Zoé

zoep_illustration

Hoodie

hoodiepatooty
hoodiepatootie

Twinkle

TwinkleLitchii

Nova

starlightsuper_nova
StarlightSprN

Noah

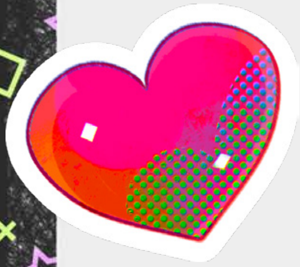
Maraschino.art
Maraschinoahx

Catt

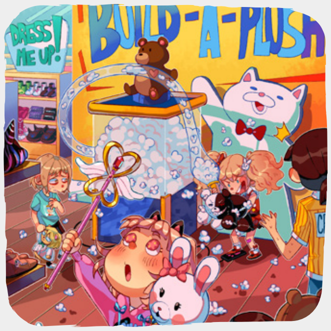
cattnim

Chloe

literal_trash_giraffe
treef_greef

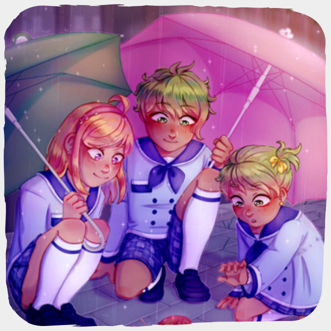


Artist Credits


DRESS ME UP!
BUILD-A-PLUSH

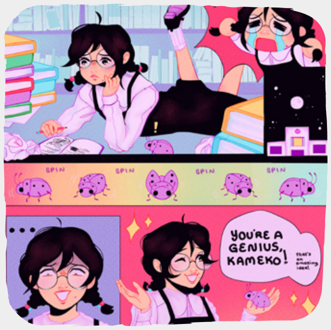
Fala

fala.mcpasta
fala-alfredo-pasta



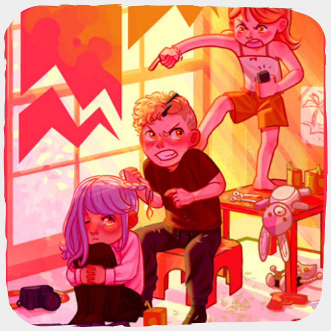
VianaDraws

viana_draws
vianadraws


SPIN
SPIN
SPIN
SPIN
YOU'RE A GENIUS, KAMEKO!

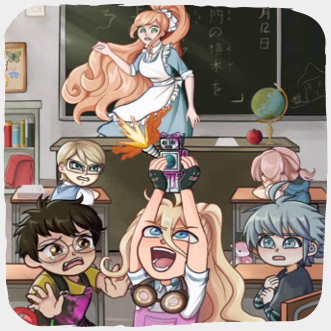
Rose

frogsprite
spritefrog



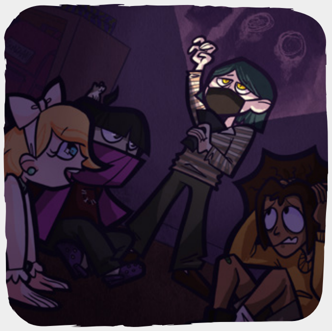
Kiana

kiianart



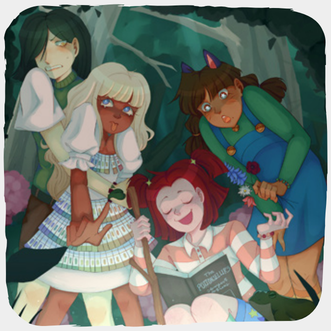
Puzzle

PuzzleWhiskers



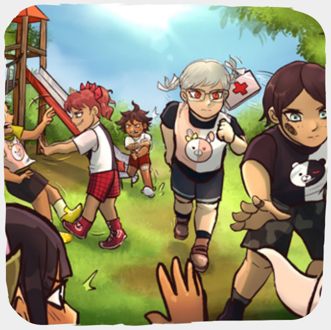
Tizzy

tooblindtizzy



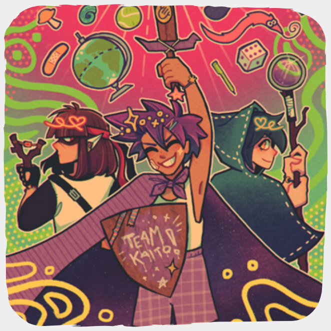
Khairos

khairosclerosis



Noelle

shernoel__
shernoel.art



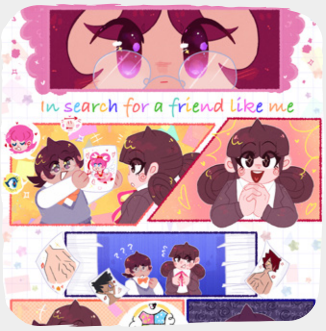
Kaz

squids0da

Artist Credits

Abby

dusdadreamer


In search for a friend like me

Yagito

Go_Hop_to_it
Go-Hop-to-it

Kay

pan.kayks
pan_kayks

Tizzy

tooblindtizzy

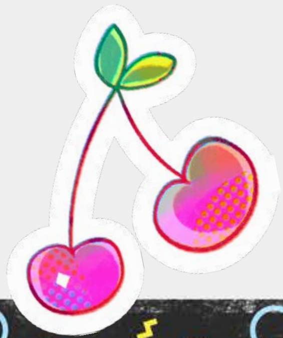
Yuli

__shslprince
shslprince

Ria

Rialexian
RiaLEXiAN

BesT frienDs!!



Writer Credits

Little Miss Liar Pants

By Zee
🐦 herbleberble
AO3 BurningFox6

Spot Art: Lav
🐦 📷 te7o_lav
t te7o_lav

Ultimate Star and her Stubborn Judge

By Omori

Spot Art: Floeer
📷 🐦 floeer9

Bad Luck, Good Luck

By Avychu
AO3 avychu
🐦 ovluda

Spot Art: Blu
📷 Blu_koiii

Red Eyes and Rodents

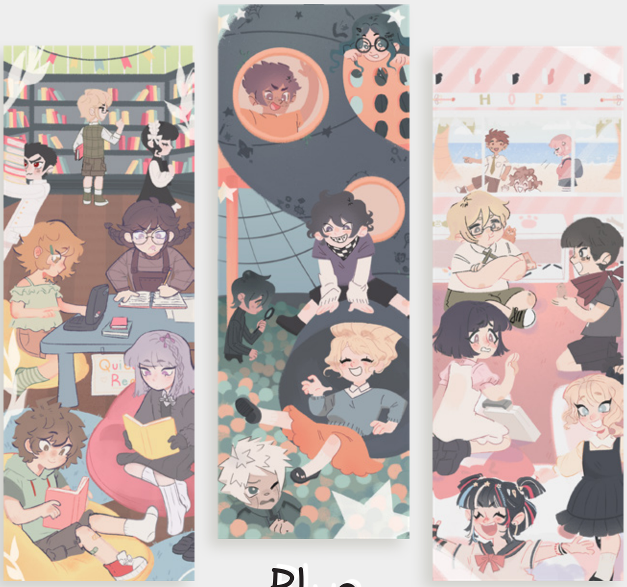
By Red
📷 🐦 t lightredfox

Spot Art: Lav
🐦 📷 te7o_lav
t te7o_lav

How We Saw the Stars

By Solstice
🐦 AO3 mokuhchi
t mokuhchi-manuscripts

Merch Credits

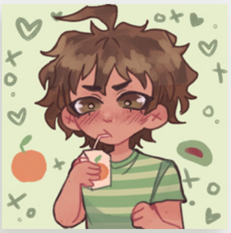


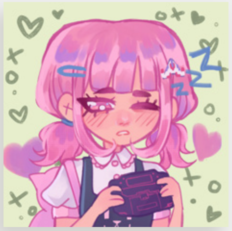
Blue

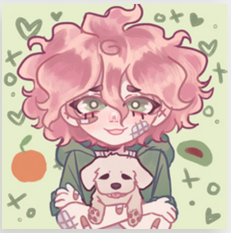
blueofthesunset

Kota/Ko

nyagitokomeowda
meshimeow

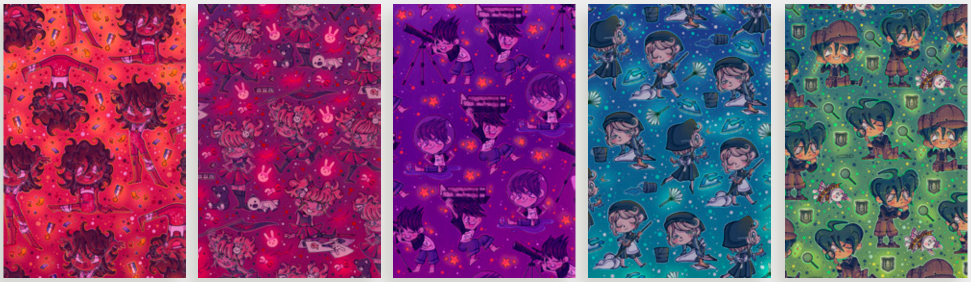


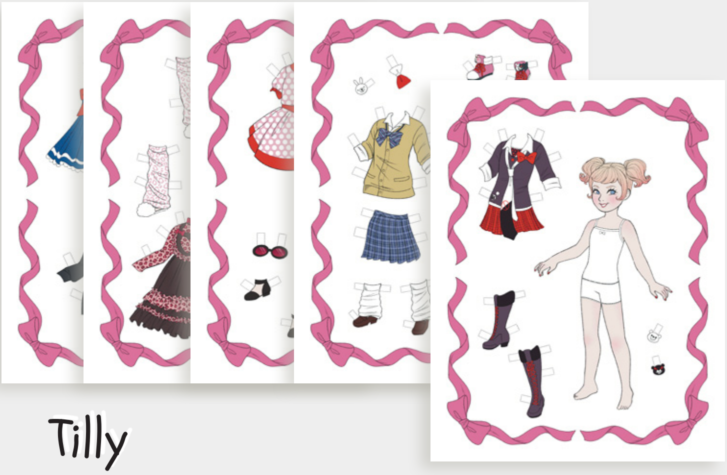




Ele

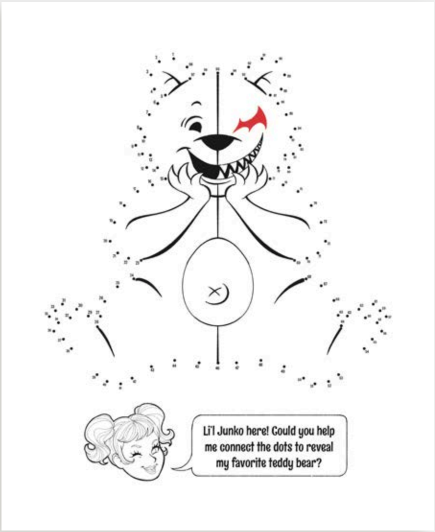
sarcellelena
sarcellele





Tilly

tillytechnicolor
tillyteknikolor


Li'l Junko here! Could you help me connect the dots to reveal my favorite teddy bear?

MALA
MALA
MA
MALA